

ACADEMIC CAPITALISM AND THE FUTURE OF LIBERAL ARTS IN HIGHER
EDUCATION: A POLICY DELPHI STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation utilizes the policy Delphi method to engage an expert panel of faculty, administrators, policy scholars and practitioners to help construct an array of policy options to address a growing policy problem, the dismantling of the American tradition of liberal arts education in the increasingly capitalist environment of the academy. Insights from this diverse, multi-disciplinary expert panel were utilized to formulate a set of policy recommendations designed to support higher education decision-makers. The findings of this study are intended to inform the long-term strategic planning and budget prioritization of campus leaders across the country who are grappling with this pressing policy issue.

Keywords: policy Delphi, liberal arts education, academic capitalism, and education policy.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Political and popular discourse in the United States is growing ever more cynical about the role and relevance of the liberal arts and sciences in higher education (Caplan, 2018). The practical arts, including vocational, technical, professional and occupational programs, continue to grow and gain in popularity as liberal arts programs struggle to meet enrollment targets. This shift can be attributed to multiple internal and external issues. Higher education leaders are responding to this crisis in the academy in a variety of ways. Some are phasing out majors in the arts, humanities and social sciences in favor of adding trendy new career preparation majors to their curricular offerings. Others are piloting creative, innovative programming that both preserves liberal arts programs and enhances student learning experience across disciplines while helping students cultivate successful pathways to careers. One thing is certain, in the current financial and political environment higher education leaders across the country would benefit from guidance in navigating this complex and pressing issue.

Chancellors and presidents spend their days putting out fires and managing a constant barrage of emerging issues that require immediate attention. They would benefit from the guidance and expertise of their peers and colleagues to support them in addressing the pressing issue of reduced enrollments in liberal arts programs and courses. However, in this time-, resource-, and geographically-constrained environment, it is challenging to arrange face-to-face meetings and discussions, so they rarely have an opportunity to occur. This study endeavors to provide a solution to minimize the barriers preventing leading experts and practitioners from engaging in these necessary discussions. Using the policy Delphi method, an expert panel of higher education leaders and practitioners will engage in an iterative “conversation” around these

issues—on their own time, in the comfort of their own homes and offices—with the end goal of generating a set of viable policy solutions to ameliorate the liberal arts crisis. The best guidance will come from peers and colleagues who are similarly situated and have a clear understanding of the challenges and opportunities education leaders face today.

Background

Current higher education policy focuses narrowly on ever increasing student enrollments, expedited pathways to graduation, and job placement outcomes. The public (politicians, media, prospective students, boards, etc.) focus almost exclusively on student employment outcome metrics to the exclusion of all other existing quality criteria. This trend is evidence of the perceived devolution of colleges and universities from being the incubators of critical inquiry, innovation, exploration and holistic development of the whole self, into training centers focused on producing workers for the current global economy. According to Slaughter and Rhodes (2004), a “new regime of academic capitalism” is displacing higher education’s role of serving the public good with a focus “not on social welfare for the citizenry as a whole but on enabling individuals as economic actors” (p. 20). Thus, the proud American tradition of a liberal arts education is being marginalized into a position of obscurity, all under the auspices of efficiency and productivity. As renowned philosopher and champion for the humanities, Martha Nussbaum (2016) poignantly cautions:

If the real clash of civilizations is, as I believe, a clash within the individual soul, as greed and narcissism contend against respect and love, all modern societies are rapidly losing the battle, as they feed the forces that lead to violence and dehumanization and fail to feed the forces that lead to cultures of equality and respect. If we do not insist on the crucial importance of the humanities and the arts, they will drop away, because they do

not make money. They only do what is much more precious than that, make a world that is worth living in, people who are able to see other human beings as full people, with thoughts and feelings of their own that deserve respect and empathy, and nations that are able to overcome fear and suspicion in favor of sympathetic and reasoned debate (p. 143).

American higher education was founded upon the principles and disciplines of the liberal arts and the humanities, and these fields continue to facilitate the lifelong learning of the inquisitive, thoughtful, resilient students who are fortunate enough to have access to such an education. Liberal arts education may not yield the level of measurable, near-term fiscal benefits that some sectors of the public and government believe higher education should be positioned to ensure, but studies show that it instills soft skills and values, knowledge, and abilities in students that the public and workforce sector indicate are essential qualities for college graduates to become productive, contributing members in a democratic society. A 2013 report from the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce indicated that employers will look for these skills in their future employees including judgement, decision-making and communication (Carnavale, Smith & Strohl, 2013). A 2018 report from the American Association of Colleges and Universities described a study of the perceptions of business executives and hiring managers. The vast majority indicated that critical thinking/analytical reasoning, ethical judgement and decision-making, ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing, were among the essential skills they sought in future employees (AAC&U, 2018). These are precisely the types of skills and knowledge gained through a comprehensive liberal education.

It is generally assumed by the public that practical and professional programs will perform well in assessments based primarily on career placement and student loan repayment metrics, and that liberal arts programs would not perform as well when assessed against these

same measures of success. Yet the literature illuminates a more nuanced employment picture for liberal arts graduates, particularly in the humanities. The Humanities Indicators, a project of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, found that although it is the case that many humanities majors select professions in the field of education, a significant share work in other fields. In 2013 14% of humanities majors worked in the legal field and nearly 6% worked in healthcare (both with advanced degrees), while 14% were employed as managers and over 3% worked in computer-related occupations (AAA&S, 2018). A 2017 analysis conducted by the Hamilton Project showed that graduates who share the same college major frequently enter into different occupations from one another, and in most fields the majority of graduates are not employed in the most common occupation associated with their major (Schanzenback, Nunn & Nantz, 2017). These data show that liberal arts majors are by no means limited in their career options, and may in fact be quite nimble in their ability to adapt and adjust to diverse professional trajectories. Yet, political and media rhetoric persists in creating a misleading dichotomy between liberal arts education and workforce preparation. This narrative is no doubt a factor guiding students and their families away from the liberal arts. The proliferation of derisive misinformation of this nature has helped create an enrollment crisis in the arts, humanities, and social sciences, which many campus leaders have responded to by reducing liberal arts program budgets and even eliminating majors at an array of institutions across the country (examples below). In defense of such decisions campus leaders claim to be responding to the demands of the market, but it does not follow that the liberal arts must necessarily be eliminated or contracted to offer only lower division courses to satisfy general education requirements in the process. Effectively addressing these threats will require campus leaders to engage in a creative, collaborative reimagining of the role of liberal arts programs in the academy today.

This study is concerned with the preservation of liberal arts education against the destructive forces of neoliberalism, which reframes the purpose of higher education from a public good regime to one focused on profit generation through a “[c]orporate-based ideology that embraces standardizing the curriculum, supporting top-down management, and reducing all levels of education to job-training sites” (Giroux, 2010). Neoliberal ideology is an economic and political paradigm that rose to prominence in the era of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, that embraces trade liberalization, deregulation, privatization, and reduced government spending (McCarthy & Prudham, 2004). Unfortunately, the perception of education as a public good has diminished alongside public funding. This does not bode well for traditional liberal arts programs which are defined here as encompassing, to varying degrees, overlapping conceptions of three related yet distinctive concepts:

1. The liberal arts as academic disciplines inclusive of the natural and social sciences, arts and humanities;
2. The educational philosophy that students should have a well-rounded foundational engagement with the liberal arts disciplines regardless of major (in the spirit of “general education”) to foster their holistic growth and development as human beings;
3. The pure form of traditional liberal arts education that is free from practical considerations and aims to liberate individuals from the shackles of ignorance, mass delusions, and unreasoned convention.

These three definitions are not mutually exclusive. I would argue that the third is the treasured ancestor of the first, providing the historical and philosophical foundation upon which contemporary liberal arts programs have flourished; the second cannot thrive without the first (at least at four-year institutions); and all three are essential elements, past and present, of the broad

liberal arts education that makes such a valuable contribution to society as an indispensable public good. For the purposes of this study, the focus will be primarily on the threat to liberal arts disciplines as majors, departments, and academic units. However, they are characterized by the spirit of the tradition of liberal arts (#3), and are philosophically and structurally intertwined with general education (#2), so there will be conceptual overlap throughout this study.

Statement of the Problem

This study is premised on the belief that the purpose of American higher education, although complicated and dynamic, includes an intrinsic commitment to provide a broad, liberal arts education to all students, regardless of chosen disciplinary major. That commitment will be difficult to maintain if higher education leaders bow to the current pressures to conform to the neoliberal-inspired model of higher education. Giroux discusses the impact of this dilemma, “[a]s corporate culture extends even deeper into the basic institutions of civil and political society, there is a simultaneous diminishing of noncommodified public spheres — those institutions such as public schools, churches, noncommercial public broadcasting, libraries, trade unions, and various voluntary institutions engaged in dialogue, education, and learning — that address the relationship of the self to public life and social responsibility to the broader demands of citizenship, as well as provide a robust vehicle for public participation and democratic citizenship” (Giroux, 2002). Thus, the policy problem this study seeks to inform is this: in the current market-driven political context of higher education, how can colleges and universities ensure that liberal arts education is preserved as a core component of their educational missions without facing political backlash and sacrificing essential federal funding opportunities?

This study will engage an expert panel of higher education leaders and policymakers in a lively, iterative “discussion” around quality in higher education, and the preservation of the

democratic ideals and liberal arts values that Nussbaum lauds and laments the possible loss of. The foundational assumption of this study is that higher education must preserve and build upon its core mission to educate students to become reflective, lifelong learners, curious critical thinkers, and productive members of a democratic society, not simply to provide a skills-based education that prepares students for specialized employment upon graduation. The very existence of liberal arts disciplines as we know them in the United States is under threat. Campus leaders are in the difficult position of struggling to maintain liberal arts programs with dwindling enrollments. Liberal arts and sciences programs are being defunded at campuses across the country. College and university leadership need an array of policy options that enable them to effectively respond to the growing internal and external threats to liberal arts education.

Threats to Liberal Arts Education

The Inside Higher Ed 2017 Survey of College and University Chief Academic Officers, showed that fully 90 percent of respondents agree that liberal education should be a central component to all undergraduate programs, even professional programs (Jaschik & Lederman, 2017). These findings demonstrate that the highest levels of campus leadership understand that liberal education is central to the core enterprise of American higher education. However, despite the widespread view of academics, the liberal arts disciplines in the United States are threatened by shrinking enrollments, declining state support and decreasing institutional support. Each of these threats can be understood as symptoms of academic capitalism and the neoliberal agenda. They are internal to the university as well as external, and ultimately lead to the reduction or elimination of funds supporting liberal arts programs.

State support for higher education has been declining or stagnating across the country for well over the last decade (with the exception of California, Hawaii, North Dakota and

Wyoming). According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, between 2008-2018, state spending on higher education fell by \$1,409 or 16% after adjusting for inflation, and in nine states it fell by over 30% (Mitchell et al., 2018). Ironically, most Americans actually believe that state spending on public higher education has either increased or remained steady over the last 10 years according to a recent survey by American Public Media (APM Research Lab, 2019). This disconnect between reality and public opinion is concerning when one considers the broader context of increasing educational costs and the closely linked student loan crisis. The skyrocketing cost to students has catalyzed vociferous diatribes from politicians railing against liberal arts programs. Political rhetoric from both sides of the aisle disparages the liberal arts while lauding the virtues and financial rates of return of professional and practical programs. Senator Marco Rubio insisted that the United States needs to produce “More welders and less philosophers” as he championed a “holistic overhaul” of the American higher education system which he and his peers view as far too liberal (Stratford, 2015). Even former President Barack Obama, who himself is the product of a liberal arts education, made the following disparaging remarks about the humanities during a speech about new job training programs to boost U.S. manufacturing:

[A] lot of young people no longer see the trades and skilled manufacturing as a viable career. But I promise you, folks can make a lot more, potentially, with skilled manufacturing or the trades than they might with an art history degree. Now, nothing wrong with an art history degree -- I love art history. So, I don't want to get a bunch of emails from everybody. I'm just saying you can make a really good living and have a great career without getting a four-year college education as long as you get the skills and the training that you need (Jaschik, 2014).

Although the Obama example was probably meant as a light-hearted barb to get a rise out of a manufacturing industry-heavy crowd, this damaging rhetoric is increasingly prevalent in the public discourse, which tends to influence the policy decisions made at the highest levels of campus administration. This is in large part because they impact the educational choices of students and their parents and therefore program enrollment. This denigration of the liberal arts and sciences in the public mind, while elevating the virtues of the disciplines that yield high financial rates of return, would logically lead to decreased demand for liberal arts majors and courses. This is reflective of an era in higher education where academic capitalism underlies the values and behaviors of campus leaders, policymakers, faculty and students as they embrace market and market-like behaviors (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997).

Another threat to liberal arts education is the increased reliance by students and parents of highly problematic national and international ranking systems to make their college decisions. These include the US Department of Education's College Scorecard (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), the US News and World Report Best Colleges Ranking (U.S. News, n.d.), and the Times World University Rankings (Times Higher Education, n.d.). These instruments are presented as useful assessments of institutional quality to be used by educational consumers. Never mind that financial metrics are weighted more heavily than educational quality and student learning metrics in the majority of these ranking systems, which necessarily biases the results. These flawed measures may be steering students and their parents away from considering the liberal arts disciplines as they dictate what matters and what quality is. In recent decades, degrees awarded in STEM and occupational and professional fields have eclipsed those awarded by traditional liberal arts disciplines, and this trend continues unabated, noticeably skewing the program array away from liberal arts in favor of practical arts, even at liberal arts colleges

(Conrad & Dunek, 2012). Data from the National Center for Education Statistics on bachelor's degrees conferred show a decrease in liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities from 47,095 in 2008-2009 to 43,661 in 2015-16; and during the same period, the number of STEM majors increased by 43% (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Degree data relating to skilled trades such as electrician, welding, HVAC, plumbing programs, etc., is less readily available than data for traditional postsecondary degrees, but there is evidence that certifications are increasing in this field as well (Wright, 2017).

Institutions are shuttering liberal arts programs at an alarming rate. Through a process of “academic prioritization” many campuses are phasing out lower-enrollment programs (most in the liberal arts disciplines) rather than seeking ways to reinvigorate and support them as mission-critical components of the academic enterprise. Some recent examples of this trend include:

- In February, 2019, McDaniel College suspended majors in art history, religious studies, French, German and music, alongside minors in German, music, and Latin (Righter, 2019).
- In May 2019, Gordon College, an evangelical Christian school, announced the elimination of chemistry, French, Spanish and physics, and the merger of political science, history and philosophy into one department (Redden, 2019).
- In 2018, Goucher College, a small liberal arts campus, announced that in response to changing student preferences it would be phasing out art, theatre, math, music, religion, physics, German, and Russian (Flaherty, 2018).
- The University of Akron, a large public research university, announced that it would be eliminating nearly one-fifth of its degree tracks including art history, French, geography, math, physics, sociology and Spanish. The administration

made the decision following a comprehensive academic program review that highlighted programs with low enrollments and relatively small numbers of graduates (Patterson, 2018).

- In 2018, the Provost of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, a regional comprehensive public university announced a plan to phase-out 13 academic programs, all in the liberal arts, in favor of adding 16 new majors that fall primarily into the category of vocational/technical training programs. President Bowen of Goucher College referred to such a shift by campus leadership as giving in to the “temptation to adopt more of the vocational programs currently in vogue with segments of the American Public” (Bowen, 2018). At UWSP these new programs included Management, Geographic Information Science, Marketing, Conservation Law Enforcement and Captive Wildlife. These new programs would rise while political science, American studies, philosophy, sociology, English, art, German, Spanish, French, music, literature, geography and geoscience would be phased out completely as majors. Fortunately, in 2019 the campus leadership removed the programs out from under the threat of elimination. This radical course change occurred following extensive consultation with faculty, which had not taken place prior to the initial announcement over a year earlier (Flaherty, 2019).
- It is not necessarily only program closures and stop-outs. Faculty lines are being cut and diversity-focused research centers are being eliminated, as well. Examples of this include the 2014 protests by students at Wesleyan objecting to the

understaffing of the African American Studies program and the 2017 closure of the Gender Research Institute at Dartmouth College (Dutt-Ballerstadt, 2019).

These are but a cross-section of samples highlighting administrative decisions that are dismantling liberal arts education. The dual threat of reduced state funding and decreasing enrollment pose significant, but hopefully not insurmountable threats to liberal arts education.

Research Questions

Higher education leaders face internal and external pressures from a variety of actors at the center of the education policy framework including students and parents, faculty, board members, politicians, and other groups and individuals with an interest in campus decision-making. There are myriad tradeoffs that must be carefully considered and negotiated as leaders make choices between competing goods with the ultimate goal of fostering a prosperous, highly impactful institution that is successful in meeting the educational (and research) goals defined by their mission. This study will take place within an educational policy framework because the desired outcome is to inform a specific set of actions, not to engage in theoretical research that is focused solely on the acquisition of knowledge or creating new areas of knowledge. Policy research is designed to address policy problems, in this case by facilitating the creation of an array of policy options that can be used by higher education leadership to respond to the pressing policy problem regarding liberal arts education. According to Green (1994), “A policy question is a request for a fairly stable, but modifiable, line of action aimed at securing an optimal adjustment of the conflict between different goods, all of which must be pursued, but which, taken together, cannot all be maximized” (p. 2). Policy questions are asked primarily to inform action, which is an intended outcome of this study. This research is centered around the following research question:

Q1. Given that higher education leaders have a responsibility to preserve liberal arts education at their institutions, what policy options would best enable them to optimally respond to the myriad internal and external threats to the liberal arts disciplines?

The nature of the policy process is such that a variety of contending goods must be considered and the point of greatest benefit, or policy optimality, can be used to help identify the most beneficial and least harmful policy option considered in isolation from others. Policy optimality is a state of ideal balance that the policy researcher aims to identify based on consideration of various contending goods. Once presented with an array of policy options, the policy maker will then work to select an option that can be pursued at a particular time, which may include a political analysis that leads to policy selection that is not necessarily in accord with the optimal policy option, yet it is the function of the researcher to provide the most complete and accurate information as to the competing factors involved and how they interact. The policy framework that will be utilized in this project will determine the values and goods in conflict with one another, and the relative costs of selecting one over the other, while seeking optimality to provide the best possible policy options to education leaders (Green, 1994). Only by gaining a clear understanding of the array of contending goods that must be considered by decision makers, can a set of truly actionable policy options be crafted. Consideration of these contending goods will position various policy options at different points of optimality on a broad spectrum that ranges from fully embracing liberal arts education with minimal regard to cost, to compliance with the neoliberal shift toward career preparation at the expense of liberal arts education.

The ideal way to create a comprehensive array of education policy options is to engage diverse education experts who are deeply involved in these issues from a variety of perspectives. This will ensure a breadth of understanding and multiple perspectives that will generate a robust set of policy choices. In general, the experts best-positioned to inform this policy issue should be from publicly-funded, 4-year, comprehensive, master's-and-doctoral granting institutions.

After considering a variety of research methodologies, the policy Delphi method was selected to address this policy problem because it provides a mechanism through which the researcher can gain the perspectives and insights of a diverse panel of higher education experts from various positions and backgrounds. This approach will inform the nuanced and complex questions posed in this study. If successful, the tradeoffs among different policy options available to higher education leaders and policy makers will be more clearly defined which makes preferred policy options more evident. This logically flows into the creation of an additional research question that will be addressed by this study:

Q2. How and to what extent did the policy Delphi method contribute to the generation of expert-level policy options for higher education leaders? What are the strengths and weaknesses to be considered when applying this method in future policy studies?

The findings of this study are intended to provide actionable policy options to help resolve the policy problem discussed above, weighing the benefits, costs and trade-offs of each option and seeking to locate a position of optimality. A panel of experts will be engaged to propose possible alternative paths forward for colleges and universities through a balanced

consideration of the trade-offs, pros and cons that must be balanced by education leaders in an evolving social and political context.

Purpose of the Study

The primary practical application of the findings of this research study is to inform the policy choices of higher education leaders and decision makers. This study collates and analyzes the thoughts and opinions of an expert panel of leaders and practitioners to inform the pressing policy question identified in research question #1. The culminating product will be a set of policy recommendations that reflect the costs and benefits of possible alternative futures for liberal arts education in American higher education. They will be designed to support decision-makers as they endeavor to think more deeply about how their schools and colleges can most effectively foster positive learning experiences for 21st century thinkers.

A comprehensive undergraduate experience encompassing a broad survey of the humanities and arts, social sciences, multicultural and global education as well as mathematics, science and technology are instrumental components to liberal arts education that prepares students to navigate a complex and dynamic future. Liberal arts education is the organizational vehicle through which an extensive array of knowledge and skills essential to a thriving democratic society can be passed on to future generations. Where it is diminished, so too departs the civil discourse, the spirit of inquiry, and sense of place and social responsibility that many societal indicators demonstrate are currently under threat. It is my hope that the findings from this study will be used by higher education decision makers to advocate for liberal arts education in whatever form it may take.

Philosophical Positionality

The spirit that drives this project is grounded in humanist values, aligned with the central ethos of liberal arts education that emphasizes educating the whole person to foster the development of civically engaged lifelong learners who will continue to evolve into productive, curious, socially responsible members of our democratic society. In addition to the skills and knowledge students seek in relation to their chosen disciplinary major, these elements are core to the broader mandate of education to serve the public good. This study is premised on an anti-utilitarian critique of the current trend in higher education policy which remains acutely focused on privileging disciplines in the practical arts and professional fields (i.e. those programs that can demonstrate high job placement rates for their graduates and immediately contribute to the global economy) to the detriment of the humanities, arts and social sciences. Utilitarian models in public policy focus exclusively on weighing factors that pertain to material goods or wealth (Morgan, 2013). The future of higher education is threatened by this market-oriented utilitarian debasement of educational and cultural ideals in the face of a production line model of higher education. According to Liu (2009), our society is in “the age of an *economistic metaphysic*, which seems to consign every possible mode of human thought and activity to the steelyard of market calculation based on consumer rationality and cost-profit analysis” (p. 104). This pervasive obsession with money obfuscates and erodes the core values and purpose of higher education.

Theoretical Framework

The framework that grounds this study is the theory of academic capitalism, which is the manifestation of neoliberal market culture in higher education (Palmdessa, 2014). Academic capitalism as a theory describes the force that drives institutions to focus on entrepreneurship,

patents, business incubators and spin-offs, but also includes the areas of online education, food and housing services, and product branding and sales of university products, all within the hidden curriculum of consumer capitalism (Slaughter, in Cantwell & Kauppinen, 2014). The combined impact of multiple financial crises and reduced state funding for higher education, created an environment that has left institutions vulnerable to the legitimization of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004).

It is certainly true that state funding for public higher education has decreased (as a result of the neoliberal view of education as a private, rather than public good) and institutions have been forced to turn to entrepreneurial activities to subsidize this massive revenue shortfall. However, the philosophical inculcation of capitalist values has reached far beyond such activities and threatens the curricular integrity and faculty autonomy that are core to the existence of the academy. Liberal arts education is not so easily exploited and commercialized as other disciplines, and therefore according to the capitalist ethos, efficiencies must be made and the effect is often program constriction and closure. This approach ignores the true funding picture in higher education in which the liberal arts disciplines subsidize the entrepreneurial research activities so lauded and cherished by campus administration (Newfield, 2016).

Significance of the Study

Engagement with a diverse liberal arts education contributes to the public good in essential and profound ways, particularly in these contentious and fearful times. As philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2004) eloquently states, “Liberal education is in one way frightening. For it requires opening the personality to change and questioning, to the possibility of moving out of the security of one's own comforting habits. In this time of fear, it is all too easy for Americans to resist this challenge, to look for comfort to a less challenging idea of education, rooted in pre-

professional and economic aspirations. To close one's 'inner eyes' is comforting; to open them with an educated compassion is difficult and painful. But only an education that reveals our common human strivings and our common human vulnerabilities, challenging us to see the distant truly, can lead us into a world of peace and global cooperation” (para. 26). Now more than ever we must embrace and preserve liberal arts education in our public institutions, not merely for the sake of cherishing an endearing American academic tradition, but for the betterment of the public good. The findings of this policy Delphi study on the future of liberal arts in higher education are intended to make two distinct contributions:

- 1) The intended positive outcome of addressing the first research question will be to effectively inform and shape policy and decision-making at institutions of higher education. The recommendations of the expert panel are intended to help guide presidents, chancellors and provosts through the complicated process of revitalizing the liberal arts traditions at their institutions.
- 2) The findings from the second research question will help inform future policy studies as a useful, yet underused, methodological tool for gathering expert opinions utilizing this efficient, easy-to-use, technique to produce robust policy options without the geographic and financial constraints of a face-to-face meeting, in a forum that mitigates the negative group dynamics that often occur when anonymity is not assured.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The first section of this literature review focuses briefly on the history of liberal arts in American higher education and the value of liberal arts education. The second section looks at the current higher education environment and how “academic capitalism” and neoliberalism have transformed the academy over the last half century. The final section explores group decision-making techniques and futures research methodologies that can be used to engage experts and practitioners to inform a set of policy recommendations that will address a policy problem.

The History and Importance of Liberal Arts Education

The liberal arts can be traced back to ancient Greece. Citizens of the young democracy required education in a broad array of disciplines to gain the knowledge and skills they needed to effectively participate in governing. According to Aristotle, the “liberal sciences” were for free men who aspired toward intellectual and moral excellence, rather than merely gaining the skills and knowledge that were practical or useful (West, 2010). According to Michael Roth (2014), President of Wesleyan University and a staunch advocate of liberal education, “Liberal education intertwines the philosophical and rhetorical so that we learn how to learn, so that we continue both inquiry and cultural participation throughout our lives because learning has become a part of who we are” (p. 5).

For centuries, the rhetorical tradition dominated, focusing on the great cultural achievements of Western civilization. In the Enlightenment period of eighteenth-century Europe, religion and knowledge of ancient languages were replaced by critical inquiry and critique as core principles of modern research universities (Roth, 2014). In the contemporary American university, the rhetorical tradition remains a central part of core undergraduate curricula and is

woven into the fabric of the liberal arts alongside the philosophical tradition of inquiry and critique. In 1636, Harvard College was founded upon the principles of liberal education and has remained the foundation upon which all colleges and universities in the United States have been structured through the 20th century, most commonly through a general education program that all students will partake in regardless of their specific major. Even following the development of comprehensive universities, general education requirements are virtually universal across all institutional types (Conrad & Dunek, 2012).

In the early American liberal arts tradition, scholars learned the virtues of a canon of monumental works from the Western liberal arts tradition that included Plato, Herodotus and Aristotle. This collection of esteemed works is referred to as the “Great Books” (so named by early education policy leaders including Thomas Jefferson), and additional works continue to be added such as Jane Austen, Alexander Hamilton and Mark Twain, among many others. St. John’s College, which refers to itself as a “true liberal arts college” still relies primarily on the Great Books and “unmediated conversation with the one another and with the books themselves” (<https://www.sjc.edu/academic-programs>) to philosophically ground their undergraduate curricula. Although this degree of fidelity to the historical liberal arts tradition would not be practical in most public institutions of higher education, it is a fascinating model that a handful of private liberal arts institutions still continue to honor. Liberal arts programs at most institutions have incorporated the Great Books into a much broader array of works from philosophers and great thinkers, artists and scientists the world over. This incorporation of knowledge from diverse cultures reflects a trend toward greater integration of liberal arts across every facet of the academy. Nussbaum (2016) sees a future where various disciplines across the academy are inculcated with the “spirit of the humanities: by searching critical thought, daring

imagination, empathetic understanding of human experiences of many different kind, and understanding of the complexity of the world we live in” (p. 7). It is perhaps this progressive evolution of liberal education to reflect the face and times of modern America that will be one of its most compelling defenses against the forces that threaten to marginalize it.

Over the last century, a battle has been waged between competing camps regarding the purpose of higher education—the practical/vocational arts and the liberal arts. In the early twentieth century, two great leaders committed to uplifting post-slavery African Americans engaged in a spirited debate over whether the focus of higher education (for African Americans) should be on vocational training or the pursuit of a comprehensive liberal education. Booker T. Washington was a staunch proponent of vocational education that he believed would prepare African Americans for trades (albeit low-level trades in most cases) which would endow Black men with economic stability without instilling educational aspirations that might lead them to challenge the White racist power structures of the post-civil war United States, thereby threatening their security and that of their families. Furthermore, this approach provided assurance to White racists in the government throughout the South and North that rather than moving up in society, freed slaves and their descendants would assuredly move down (Johnson & Watson, 2004). W.E.B Dubois pushed back on Washington’s view, championing a liberal education for African Americans, not necessarily to the exclusion of practical training but with a clear objective to holistically prepare Black men for citizenship in a free, democratic society. This would in part be instilled through knowledge of the Great Books, which he viewed as a potential source of human liberation. More than a century later, this tension between the practical and liberal arts is echoed in the current public and political discourse around the purpose of higher education.

In its most polarized conception, this dichotomy is expressed as one where the vocational and professional fields prepare students for high-earning professions, while the liberal arts simply prepare graduates to become brilliant cab drivers and worldly, multilingual baristas. The political and public discourse rarely considers the myriad public fiscal (reduced usage of social safety nets, healthier families, reduced incarceration rates, increased philanthropy, etc.) and non-fiscal (civically-engaged community contributors) benefits to society afforded by a liberally educated citizenry. Instead it focuses almost exclusively on the private benefits to the individual (Newfield, 2016). Studies show that employers and the general public alike place high value on the outcomes of liberal education including analytical judgment, social responsibility and economic opportunity. Yet ironically liberal education as a concept is not so valued. This is perhaps because the relationship between the two is not clearly understood, and as such these educational practices may remain underappreciated and vulnerable. Geary Schneider refers to this paradox as a “conspiracy of voluntary silence” which effectively conceals the valuable role liberal education plays in shaping existing and emerging curricula (Geary Schneider, 2004). This disconnect may be evidence of the ineffectiveness of the academy to convey the value of liberal education in clear, evidence-based terms, which allows opponents of liberal education to downplay the numerous benefits to a democratic society.

In the current conversation, income and contribution to GDP seems to trump all else, to the detriment of the liberal arts and ultimately to institutional autonomy. This trend serves to obfuscate the real purpose of higher education, what it should look like, what curricula should be taught, and to what end. Conrad & Dunek (2012) caution:

Nested within this context of fundamental change wrought by powerful economic incentives, college and university administrators, faculty, students, and external

stakeholders lack a guiding vision that holds the promise of informing undergraduate education—from curriculum requirements and course design to teaching practices, and above all the learning experiences for our students. Indeed, one of the most formidable challenges ahead for higher education is the essential need to advance a vision of higher learning that revitalizes the meaning of a college-educated person for the twenty-first century in ways that help to ensure that our colleges graduates are prepared not only for the workplace but also to fulfill their human potential (p. 26).

Quality and the Value of Liberal Arts Education

Carol Geary Schneider (2004), former president of AAC&U, an organization that champions the liberal arts, reflects on the roots of American liberal education, “There is...a persistent identification of liberal education with democratic freedom, scientific progress and excellence that goes back to the revolutionary period when many civic and political leaders both extolled the liberal arts and also challenged them to embrace the scientific and practical needs of the new republic,” (Geary Schneider, 2004). Yet, public and political rhetoric in recent decades has openly denigrated the liberal arts and sciences, and extolled the virtues of professional and practical programs. This trend is reflective of a new era in higher education where “academic capitalism” dictates the behaviors of campus leaders and policymakers. “Academic capitalism” refers to the “market and market-like behaviors on the part of universities and among faculty” (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). This broad definition has evolved to include an array of profit-focused segments of the higher education enterprise which have shifted the focus of institutions away from the academic core in favor of what Hermanowicz (2016) refers to as the “valorization of shiny things”- a valuing of market-related phenomena over knowledge of its

own accord” (p. 306). These include ostentatious new campus facilities; patents, licenses and contracts; increased rankings and the like. These “shiny things” distract institutional leadership from their focus on inquiry and learning.

The purpose of American higher education, although complicated and dynamic, has historically included an intrinsic commitment to provide a broad, liberal arts education to all students, regardless of disciplinary major. This commitment is becoming increasingly difficult to uphold in an environment where higher education leaders are bowing to the pressures to embrace a market-driven neoliberal capitalist model of higher education that values short-term monetary gains over long-term social benefits. According to Newfield (2016) “[s]tandard cost-benefit analysis fails to capture the bulk of the public university’s value, which occurs through spillovers to present and future societies, and which permeates activities far from the university” (p.76). The value of a liberal arts education to the individual, to employers, and to society is supported by the literature, and yet bipartisan political discourse is consistently disparaging of the liberal arts. This reputational denigration of liberal arts education has led to reduced institutional and state support, and to the diminishing popularity and demand for liberal arts majors by students and their parents. The source of these negative attitudes can be found in the shift in American higher education from a “public good knowledge regime” to an “academic capitalist knowledge regime” (Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004, p. 28). The former is associated with a spirit of inquiry aimed at producing new knowledge for the betterment of society, while the latter seeks to privatize and commodify that knowledge, making the core components of the academic enterprise- learning, scholarship, and even non-academic student experiences- into commodities to be exploited for profit (Rubins, 2007). The result of this shift and its ripple effects presents a tangible and persistent threat to the liberal arts in American higher education.

The U.S. was the first country to fund universal public education and embrace liberal arts education for all (albeit with a limited conception of who “all” referred to) but as public funding declines and student debt burdens rise, access to liberal education remains inaccessible to a large cross-section of the population. Nonetheless, the U.S. system still boasts one of the richest and most diverse array of institutional offerings in the world (Zakaria, 2015). However, given the current trend of institutional and liberal arts program closures, it may only be a matter of time before our system more closely reflects the rigid homogeneity that once characterized our international peers. This threat to liberal arts education can be explained, at least in part, by the theory of academic capitalism.

Academic Capitalism and Neoliberalism

The political and economic instability of the 1970’s laid the groundwork for the neoliberal revolution. According to Harvey (2007), neoliberalism “values market exchange as an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action, and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs. It emphasizes the significance of contractual relations in the marketplace. It holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market” (p. 3). In American public higher education, this neoliberal market culture manifested itself in the guise of “academic capitalism” (Palmadessa, 2014). “The focus of academic capitalism (as a theory) is not restricted to commercialization of research but also takes into consideration other aspects of universities (e.g. instruction and administration) and changing relations between universities and their social environments. Academic capitalism is a many-sided framework for developing understanding also of such a diverse phenomenon as the influence of neoliberalism, new managerialism, and calls for accountability, assessment and rankings” (Kauppinen, 2013). The

unfortunate combination of decreasing state support for public higher education in tandem with several national financial crises, created a higher education environment that was all too conducive to the legitimation of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004).

The spirit of neoliberalism insidiously swelled into the hallowed halls of the academy as students became debt-bearing consumers of an educational product. Around the same time that student loan legislation was being overhauled to allow students to take on greater debt burdens, the Bayh-Dole act of 1980 provided the space for universities to commercialize and profit off of the research of their faculty. Ironically, but well-aligned with the neoliberal agenda, during this same period several states enacted labor laws and regulations that allowed universities to de-professionalize faculty work by hiring part-time and temporary instructors, reducing health care and other benefits (Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004). The multi-faceted entrance of neoliberalism into public higher education wreaked havoc on every aspect of the academy, with a momentum that has propelled it unabated ever since.

Initially, the theory of academic capitalism largely focused on the translation of research into products or new enterprises (Seashore & Anderson 1998). Mechanisms for technology and research transfer to market-like practices (tech spinoffs, business incubators, patents/IP), has expanded to include online education and proprietary educational products, branding and sales of university paraphernalia to students, as well as the privatization of auxiliary services including housing and food services, all of which created a hidden curriculum of consumer capitalism (Slaughter, in Cantwell & Kauppinen, 2014). This new era recreates the student as “super-consumer” not only of education, but of a wide array of ancillary products and services. The shift from a public good knowledge/learning regime to an academic capitalist knowledge/learning

regime has brought about significant changes in research and education (Slaughter and Rhodes, 2004).

According to Slaughter and Rhodes (2000), this is in alignment with the neoliberal trend in government to defund programs focused on general welfare (health care, environmental protection, education) while bolstering those which emphasize corporate welfare (tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy, erosion of health and environmental regulations that might inhibit corporate growth, etc.). They assert that academic units that are perceived as close to the marketplace are receiving an increasing share of support while those which are believed to be further from corporate markets suffer from reduced support:

Public colleges and universities are exemplars of neoliberalism. As with neoliberal regimes worldwide, U.S. public higher education assigns markets central social value. Public colleges and universities emphasize that they support corporate competitiveness through their major role in the global, knowledge-based economy. They stress their role in training advanced students for professional positions close to the technoscience core of knowledge economies, in fostering research that creates high-tech products and processes for corporations, and in preparing undergraduate and community college students to be malleable workers who will fit into (and be retrained for) new information-based jobs and workplaces. In the process, the fundamental social roles of public higher education, including providing increased upward mobility for underserved populations, have been displaced by the economic role of serving corporations' global competitiveness (p. 73).

Mendoza and Burger (2005) posit that academic capitalism is the response of public universities “to external forces of globalization by maintaining and expanding revenues critical for the organization through market-like behaviors in times when state funding is more and more scarce” (p. 2). It is certainly true that state funding for public higher education has decreased (as a result of the neoliberal view of education as a private, rather than public good) and institutions have been forced to turn to entrepreneurial activities to subsidize the resultant revenue shortfall. However, the philosophical inculcation of capitalist values has reached far beyond such activities and threatens the curricular integrity and faculty autonomy that are core to the existence of the academy. Liberal arts education is not so easily exploited and commercialized as other disciplines, and therefore according to the capitalist ethos, efficiencies must be made and the effect is program constriction and closure. Newfield (2016) argues that public institutions are actually subsidizing supposed revenue-generating research as funders largely do not cover the array of infrastructure and support required to carry out grant activities. This internal subsidy, which ranges from nine to twenty percent, is taken from other areas of the university budget which “diverts funds from instruction and research that has few outside sponsors, particularly in the arts, humanities, and qualitative and social sciences” (p. 91). So, in a very real sense, research relies heavily on the liberal arts disciplines, and yet they are precisely the programs targeted for closure during discussions of budget prioritization. In order to more fully appreciate what we are under threat of losing, we must revisit the history of liberal arts education and understand its relevance in American society today.

Quality in higher education is closely linked to institutional status, which is largely defined by international ranking systems that privilege research and productivity in STEM fields while, according to Ericson (2017) they encourage “the neglect of undergraduate teaching, the

arts, humanities, and social sciences, as well as engagement with the surrounding community” (p. 74). These rankings heavily influence students and parents in determining what institutions to apply to, and therefore chancellors and presidents put enormous resources into elevating their place. Erikson refers to this notion of educational quality as “meeting customers’ needs and wants” which he posits “runs counter to the supposition that higher education faculties know something more about the nature of education than their potential customers” (p. 76). He continues on to point out that the public in general is not certain what those aforementioned needs and wants actually are.

If defining quality in higher education is to be removed from the realm of the academy (where it logically belongs) only to be placed within the purview of an uninformed public whose determination of quality is based on heavily-skewed ranking systems and an uncertain sense of their needs and wants, that certainly does not bode well for the liberal arts. Contemporary political discourse rarely considers the myriad fiscal (reduced usage of social safety nets, healthier families, reduced incarceration rates, etc.) and non-fiscal (civically engaged critical thinkers) benefits to society of a liberally educated citizenry, despite studies and research supporting both of these claims.

Profit-driven forces have privileged professional, occupational and vocational programming to the detriment of traditional liberal arts programs through the legislation and rhetoric of corporate model- focused policymakers and an increasing public perception that the liberal arts are not valuable because the near-term benefits are not as apparent as the financial gains to be found in certain practical and professional programs. In recent decades, degrees in occupational and professional fields have eclipsed those awarded by traditional liberal arts disciplines and this trend continues unabated, noticeably skewing the program array away from

liberal arts in favor of practical arts, even at liberal arts colleges (Conrad & Dunek, 2012). This disturbing trend is reinforced by the federal government as it wields greater education funding authority as a mechanism to manipulate institutions to conform to lawmakers' misinformed assumptions about the purpose of higher education. This study is premised on the assumption that liberal arts education is indeed a public good, and seeks to present practical policy options to empower colleges and universities to maintain decision-making autonomy in this seemingly untenable political environment. Morgan (2013) asserts that the general public is not equipped to competently judge education, and that the leaders of public universities are society's representatives of the profession of learning, and, therefore they must "demonstrate public intellectual and ethical leadership" (p. 133). Although this sentiment could be interpreted as ivory tower elitism, it speaks to the moral imperative placed upon the leaders of public higher education to trust their own expertise, maintain fidelity to the core mission of their institutions, and present an assertive defense against the pressures to conform to a utilitarian, business-oriented model of education.

Group Decision-Making Techniques and the Delphi Method

Futures studies is grounded in a variety of disciplines in the social and natural sciences as well as architecture and medicine. The field focuses on developing and applying methodologies and techniques to a broad array of issues and problems that have important strategic implications (Roney, 2010). Futurists conduct various types of analyses depending on the type of issue being addressed. Emerging issues analysis, issues analysis, and environmental scanning are used for those topics where the problem or opportunity is not yet established in popular discourse, while trend analysis is used more frequently when considering issues that are already well established (Dator, 2002). This study aims to explore likely and alternative futures in relation to pressing

issues regarding the future of liberal arts education in the American academy. Given the limited availability of data, futures methods could be used to engage experts to explore the pros and cons of a set of alternative futures to formulate an array of policy options that could be used to affect positive change in a challenging political environment. For issues such as those identified above, a forecasting method designed to make informed assumptions about the future would be the best fit.

Forecasting models can be quantitative or qualitative in nature, but always focus on criteria such as timing, feasibility, desirability, probability and importance, impacts, barriers and costs. There is a growing body of approaches and techniques ranging from the quantitative statistical estimations commonly used by the business sector to conduct various forms of economics forecasting or by demographers conducting population projections, to the qualitative approaches that involve a process of structured expert consultation. Expert forecasting can be used when quantitative analysis is not plausible or if a qualitative approach is “likely to increase the accuracy relevance or acceptability of forecasts” (Green, Graefe, & Armstrong, 2010, p. 2). Expert forecasting methods engage two or more experts using one of various structured approaches, including Nominal Group Technique (NGT), the Delphi method, and focus groups. It is essential to select a forecasting method that is the best fit to respond to the issues that are central to the study (Armstrong, 2005).

Delphi is a technique for structuring group communication processes to address complex problems or issues (Linstone and Turoff, 1975). It is a qualitative forecasting method that engages a panel of experts in a group communication process that elicits, refines and ascertains a collective opinion or range of opinions about important issues to guide future planning, policy and decision-making. The basic architecture of this methodology consists of series of iterative

survey rounds administered to a panel of experts. Responses from each round are provided back to the panel in each subsequent round along with a new set of questions. Delphi is premised on the belief that consideration of various expert positions and predictions will lead to an informed sense of what problems and possibilities are the most likely outcome. The technique is appropriately named “Delphi” after the oracle of Delphi from ancient Greece who invoked the god Apollo to make prophecies of future events on behalf of those seeking guidance (Hsu & Sanford, 2007). Unlike other forecasting methods, the goal of the policy Delphi is not to reach consensus or a single answer, but to elicit as many informed expert opinions as possible regarding an issue or a series of issues (Gupta & Clarke, 1996). Delphi is used in a broad array of disciplines and industries in a variety of formats to guide thinking, planning and decision-making.

Though the process dates back to the late 1940's, it was popularized in 1963 when researchers at the RAND Corporation conducted a study looking at the problem of a possible nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. They engaged a panel of nuclear experts to reach consensus on a variety of issues that could then guide the foreign policy decisions of the United States government in relation to the perceived Soviet threat (Davidson, 2013). Specifically, the researchers Dalkey and Helmer asked their panel to provide estimates of the number of twenty kiloton atom bombs industrial targets could be hit with before productivity over a two-year period would drop to no more than one-fourth of its usual munitions output (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963). This rather morbid exercise remained classified until ten years after the study was conducted. Nonetheless, this seminal work is credited with raising awareness of the Delphi technique as a feasible application for eliciting expert opinion to inform decision-making around pressing policy issues. Dalkey and Helmer's (1963) objective in utilizing the

Delphi method was to mitigate negative effects of group interactions in the process of data collection, which were highly problematic in conventional group decision making processes. To this point, the researchers state:

The method employed in the experiment appears to be more conducive to independent thought on the part of the experts and to aid them in the gradual formation of a considered opinion. Direct confrontation, on the other hand, all too often induces the hasty formulation of preconceived notions, an inclination to close one's mind to novel ideas, a tendency to defend a stand once taken or, alternatively and sometimes alternately, a predisposition to be swayed by persuasively stated opinions of others (p. 459).

Although the RAND studies primarily related to military issues, Delphi has since been utilized by various disciplines to assist in measurement and forecasting to aid decision-making and has been modified from its original or "classical" form into various other manifestations which will be discussed below. Fields that have utilized Delphi since the RAND studies include education, health care, information and management, business and industry (Gupta & Clarke, 1996). The method continues to gain in popularity, particularly in the fields of education and social sciences, and comparison studies of Delphi against methods using statistical groups and classic groups with direct interaction are generally positive in favor of Delphi (Landetta, 2006). The number of PhD dissertations utilizing the Delphi technique is still low relative to other qualitative research methods. In fact it is the least common qualitative research design utilized by dissertation researchers, with case studies and grounded theory making up the vast majority. This can be attributed to the methodological preferences of committee chairs or lack of coverage of the Delphi technique in research methodology texts and resources (Avella, 2016), both of which

may stem from early criticisms of the Delphi as being scientifically unreliable and methodologically flawed (Sackman, 1975).

Limited research has been conducted regarding the rigor of Delphi studies in general, and the flexible and adaptive nature of the method adds to this challenge, yet it continues to enjoy frequent utilization among researchers across disciplines (Hasson & Keeney, 2011). According to Dalkey & Helmer (1963), “[t]his mode of controlled interaction among the respondents represents a deliberate attempt to avoid the disadvantages associated with more conventional uses of experts, such as round-table discussion” (p. 458). Individuals often produce higher quality information when queried separately than they do in a group setting. There are a variety of group dynamics that factor into face-to-face group decision-making settings. These include participants going off on tangents, a minority of individuals dominating the discussion, peer pressure to conform to the strongest or prevailing line of thinking, individual panelist apprehension to express opinions freely for fear of judgment by others as ignorant or uninformed, and apprehension to rescind previous statements or positions out of stubbornness (Linstone and Turroff, 1975), and groupthink—the tendency for people in groups to feel pressured not to dissent from the prevailing majority opinion that can prevent individuals from expressing alternative perspectives on an issue (Janis, 1982). The anonymous nature of the Delphi removes these negative group dynamics from play, thereby freeing participants to express their views candidly without fear of judgment.

Delphi Types: Classical, Policy, and Decision

The Delphi method is constantly adapting to fit the unique specifications of different research questions. The approach is designed to explore group attitudes toward needs and priorities in relation to an identified problem or question. Issues that arise between different

Delphi types are the volume of different approaches and their definitions, decision rules on when consensus is reached or when it is time to conclude the study, and criteria for defining an expert (Hasson & Keeney, 2011). The common attributes that pervade across all variations are that complete anonymity is maintained for all members of the panel throughout the process and the data collection and feedback process is iterative. This allows participants to reassess and refine their responses after reviewing the aggregated and anonymized responses of the other members of the panel (Rowe & Wright, 1999). This controlled feedback can provide additional insights for the consideration of each panel member helping them come closer to reaching consensus, or in some cases reaffirming their previous position while providing additional points to support their position.

There are three primary variations of Delphi: classical Delphi, decision Delphi and policy Delphi (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). For each of these, there are additional methodological modifications, including the integration of other approaches such as focus group and NGT as discussed above. Types of Delphi are not only characterized by varying approaches to application of the method including the types of questions asked and the types of information being sought, but the end result and intended use of findings differs as well. Differences between the three primary Delphi types fall into six categories:

- 1) Whether consensus is the primary objective;
- 2) Accuracy, reliability, validity and over-all rigor;
- 3) The array of the panel and what constitutes an expert;
- 4) The number of iterations and controlled feedback;
- 5) The role of the researcher;
- 6) Whether anonymity is maintained throughout, partially, or not at all (Crisp et al., 1997).

The classical Delphi is used as a long-range planning tool that engages an expert panel through a controlled process that ultimately concludes when consensus has been reached on the questions at hand. The decision Delphi varies slightly from the classical approach in that it is explicitly focused on bringing together a panel of experts to make decisions about impending developments (Davidson, 2013). The Policy Delphi varies from both the classical and decision Delphi methods since it seeks neither to reach consensus on a set of ideas nor to assist in the decision-making process (Linstone and Turroff, 1975; Rauch, 1979) rather as Crisp et al. (1997) states, “the aim is achieving a clearer understanding of the plurality of standpoints” (p. 117) that exist in relation to a particular policy issue in order to support a deeper analysis. Consensus may be an eventual outcome of a policy Delphi, but when this occurs it is generally not by design (Manley, 2013). The policy Delphi is similar to the classical Delphi in that it allows the researcher to extrapolate themes and concepts on a particular topic by engaging an expert panel through an iterative process of engagement via carefully constructed surveys followed by controlled feedback. However, the objective of the policy Delphi is not to reach consensus among a homogenous panel of experts. It is rather to gain a broad understanding of the array of perspectives and supporting evidence. The policy Delphi allows the researcher to gain expert and impacted stakeholder opinions as to how policies or changes to policies can alter programs and institutions that they are targeted to impact (Manley, 2013). It can be used as an initial step in group decision-making or as a starting point for conducting scenarios exercises. It functions well in this role because like other Delphi methods, it removes many of the negative group dynamics, but it additionally engages a heterogeneous array of experts so the results will represent a broad spectrum of views including the relative trade-offs, pros and cons. Given these conditions, the policy Delphi may be an ideal method to support policy analysis and policy formulation.

Other modifications to the Delphi include hybrid approaches that incorporate interviews and focus groups somewhere in the process, “Real Time” or “Conference” approaches which use online computer software or conferencing systems to conduct single-round Delphi studies (Gordon & Pease, 2006), and “e-Delphi” which utilizes email and online platforms to engage panelists and administer surveys. The type of modification selected depends on the type of question, the resources and timeframe of the researcher, and the desired end goal or intended use and audience of the results.

Delphi Panel Selection

Panel selection is one of the most important elements of the Delphi research design since the credibility and quality of the informed responses of the participants relies almost solely on the quality of the panel. Indeed, one of the key criticisms of the method is the lack of clearly articulated criteria for determining what constitutes an expert versus a layperson, and subsequently panels may be poorly selected (Gupta & Clarke, 1996). There is minimal guidance in the literature regarding criteria for panel selection, but members should be exceptionally knowledgeable and competent in the particular field and subject area at the core of the study (Hsu & Stanford, 2007). Furthermore, the panel should be sufficiently representative of the constituents of interest to the study. If the panel is not appropriately arrayed, the results of the study may be rendered insignificant to the user. An example of this is the “Safe Foods” Delphi conducted by Frewer et al., which looked at international stakeholder opinions around food safety and regulation with an aim to increase consumer confidence. The approach utilized by the researchers to identify the experts and key stakeholders did not produce adequate representation of international stakeholders, and therefore the results were not able to reach the international resonance (due to lack of international representation) needed to inform conclusive policy

recommendations (Frewer et al., 2011). A panel selection mistake such as this can render the findings of the study virtually useless, so it is crucial that this process is afforded appropriate attention.

The researcher must consider a variety of phenomena when considering panel selection. Although many studies have found that over the course of survey rounds with iterative constructed feedback, predictive or judgmental accuracy of the Delphi expert panel performs consistently better than alternative techniques, the complex relationship between various study variables still appears to impact the degree to which this holds true across studies (Rowe et al., 2015). The “theory of errors” posits that there are two primary types of respondents- those who are less likely to change their views over a series of iterations and those who are more likely to alter their views based on review of feedback from previous rounds. If those less likely to change their views are in fact the more expert and accurate in their judgments than the group that is more likely to conform to the group norm, then the overall effect will be that the group judgment will improve. However, it can be highly problematic for the results of a Delphi study if “egocentric discounting” occurs. In such a case, even after receiving expert advice the individual is more likely to maintain their previous position than to heed the advice of other experts. This is most likely the result of “egocentric bias” where an individual defends their original opinion for the simple fact that it is theirs. Such conditions can prevent the group responses from moving toward an accurate prediction (Bolger & Wright, 2011).

Purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research as an alternative to quantitative sampling approaches of probabilistic or random sampling methods that are designed to increase validity and reduce bias (Palinkas et al., 2015). Given the need for Delphi panels to consist of experts and highly knowledgeable practitioners, random sampling is not a viable

option. Cascade sampling leverages personal contacts of the researcher as well as experts from publicly recognized organizations with interests in the same area as the study subject matter (Frewer et al., 2011). The initial group of selectees are then asked to provide names of additional experts in the field, hence the cascading effect from one set of experts to another. Also referred to as snowball sampling, this approach, though it runs counter to the principles of statistical sampling, can provide access to a targeted population (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Utilizing existing social and professional networks, this approach to sampling may also increase the response rates of panel members since they have a personal connection to the researcher and/or their colleagues (Frewer et al., 2011). Despite the trade-off of some degree of scientific rigor that is made when the researcher utilizes purposeful sampling over quantitative approaches, cascade or snowball sampling is clearly a better fit for the purposes of Delphi panel creation.

Delphi Survey Creation and Administration

A Delphi study is generally conducted in two or more rounds of surveying and constructed feedback, however based on a 2007 analysis of published research that utilized the Delphi method, it appears that the most common number of rounds is three (Skulmoski, Hartman & Krahn, 2007). Though the process can vary between studies, the most common approach for a three-round Delphi can be captured in eight steps:

- 1) Develop the survey questions;
- 2) Select the expert panel;
- 3) Distribute Round One survey;
- 4) Collect and analyze Round One responses;
- 5) Provide constructed feedback based on Round One responses and distribute Round Two survey;

- 6) Repeat process for Round Three;
- 7) Analyze results;
- 8) Distribute results.

The survey questions can be open-ended, closed-ended, or closed-ended with an option for the panelist to provide additional comments (Nowack, Endrikat, & Guenther, 2011). According to the authors, it is crucial that the array of questions should “focus on timing, probability, feasibility, desirability and the importance of occurrence, possible courses of action, impacts, costs and barriers” (p. 612). Given the iterative nature and multiple rounds of survey administration intrinsic to the Delphi technique, it is important that enough time be allowed for consideration and completion of each round, but that not too much time be allowed to elapse in the interim causing disengagement that might decrease the likelihood of completing subsequent rounds. The literature suggests 45 days as an approximation of the amount of time for the overall survey administration with two weeks between each round (Delbeq et al., 1975).

Survey creation should involve input from content experts and from psychometrically trained social scientists. It is recommended that an in-depth qualitative stage be undertaken to create the first survey round. This phase can include a preliminary qualitative survey (or “scoping” study), workshops and interviews with a subset of the expert panel members to help develop the Round One survey. This can help the researcher to calibrate the survey tool to resolve any potential issues with wording and length (Frewer et al., 2011). In this fashion, the Round One survey instrument can be streamlined to incorporate more refined and reasoned statements for the expert panel to respond to, thus shortening the overall length, which could in turn encourage higher response rates in subsequent rounds. Although this approach is more resource and time intensive at the front end of the study, it may ameliorate some of the

challenges that Delphi researchers face in the second round of having to manage and distill an unwieldy amount of qualitative data from the first round to feed back to the panel in a comprehensive, yet succinct fashion.

A companion approach to the open-ended questions in Round One of the Delphi that is worth exploring for this study is the use of vignettes as a component of the survey instrument. Vignettes are used in qualitative research during face-to-face interviews to help illustrate real-world issues through stories or hypothetical examples. In the context of survey research, vignettes are brief narratives or stories which respondents are asked to read and then provide a ranking via a Likert-type scale to determine things like level of acceptability, frequency, etc. According to Barter & Renold (2000), “qualitative research vignettes have been increasingly employed to elicit cultural norms derived from respondents’ attitudes to and beliefs about a specific situation and to highlight ethical frameworks and moral codes” (p. 310). They are not, however, common in Delphi studies. One such study was conducted by Collins et al. (2009) to evaluate perceptions of equine welfare. They used vignettes in a policy Delphi during Round One to display a broad range of possible issues and in Round Three to “ground theoretical concepts in the respondents’ reality, stimulate a deeper consideration of the issues, and encourage participants to stay with the study to its conclusion” (p. 68). The researchers attributed their zero percent attrition rate throughout all three rounds to the fact that the vignettes closely reflected reality and the Delphi method was engaging (Collins et al., 2009).

Analysis and Feedback of Delphi Rounds

The majority of Delphi studies provide some form of iterative feedback to panel participants. Constructed feedback between survey rounds is often provided in the form of statistical group response including measures of central tendency (medium, mean, mode), level

of dispersion or variance (Hasson, Keeney & McKenna, 2000), and preliminary scenarios, quotes and aggregated results of reasons and arguments (Nowack, Endrikat, & Guenther, 2011). Content analysis is used to collate the individual comments provided by panel members, and the responses are ordered by theme and shared back with the group for the next survey round. Throughout this process it must be ensured that anonymity is not compromised in the feedback of qualitative responses (Crisp et al., 1997). The level of detail and nature of the feedback is contingent upon the survey design itself, which may include open- or closed-ended questions or vignettes with ranked responses, possibly with provision for additional comments.

Possible Limitations of the Delphi Method

Survey methods can be costly, time consuming and labor intensive. However, advances in modern communication and technology have made the Delphi method a more feasible approach than it previously had been when the surveys were mailed and completed by hand. Today, Delphi surveys can be administered by email or by utilizing a variety of web-based platforms and survey instruments. This greatly ameliorates the issues of time and cost that may in the past have prevented researchers from exploring the Delphi method.

Due to the variation in background, biases and experiences of the expert panelists, time constraint issues, and the fact that there is no way to control for whether respondents are thinking through their opinions in light of the group positions and reaching authentic consistency of opinion or simply conforming to the group norm, there may be a validity issue that should be expressed as a limitation of the study for the reader to consider. Further, the researcher's interpretation of the survey results may be biased (Clayton, 1997). Low response rates, perhaps in part due to multiple rounds, inadvertently leading the panel responses in a direction preferred by the researcher, and failing to solicit expert opinions as opposed to statements demonstrating

limited knowledge, are all potential issues that may arise in a Delphi study that should be addressed in the study design and implementation plan (Hsu & Stanford, 2007). Outcome-oriented bias or interviewer bias is a serious issue that should be considered in the analysis of survey results as well (Rambo, 1969). This is particularly relevant when using the Delphi technique since it is a researcher intensive approach with several iterations of analysis and feedback, all of which are moderated through the researcher. It is good practice to engage psychometrically trained social scientists in constructing the surveys, especially the Round One survey, as it most commonly consists of open-ended questions. This additional check on the survey prior to administration will help to ensure that the items do not inadvertently steer the responses of the panel into the direction of the preconceived perspectives of the researcher (Davidson, 2013).

Another prominent critique of the Delphi method is whether one of its central tenets, the preservation of the anonymity of the expert panel, might actually create an environment for respondents to answer frivolously due to a sense of decreased accountability (Sackman, 1975). However, this may be mitigated by selecting a highly regarded group of expert panelists who feel deeply engaged with the issues in question, and will therefore be highly motivated to provide detailed, authentic responses to the survey questions.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In the current market-driven political context of higher education, how can colleges and universities ensure that liberal arts education is preserved as a core component to their educational mission without facing political backlash and sacrificing essential federal funding opportunities? The research questions below flow directly from the need to address this policy problem and to find the best mechanism for doing so. In the process of answering these questions, an array of policy options was generated with the intent of supporting decision-making at the highest levels of the university.

Research Questions

Q1. Given that higher education leaders have a responsibility to preserve liberal arts education at their institutions, what policy options would best enable them to optimally respond to the myriad internal and external threats to the liberal arts disciplines?

Q2. How, and to what extent, did the policy Delphi method contribute to the generation of expert-level policy options for higher education leaders? What are the strengths and weaknesses to be considered when applying this method in future policy studies?

Rationale for Selecting the Policy Delphi

The methodological design chosen to address the research questions above needed to be qualitative in nature to support the development of a deeper sense of the breadth and range of views held by experts when considering the policy problem posed in the first research question. After reviewing several research methodologies for this project, I determined that the best approach for illuminating the current policy and practical issues around the future of liberal arts

education in American colleges and universities would be to engage experts from a broad array of stakeholder groups through the administration of a policy Delphi. It has been shown to be more effective than statistical and classic groups with direct interaction (Landetta, 2006). It was a better fit for this study than other group decision-making methodologies such as NGT and classical interaction group process because the expert participants required to yield credible findings and recommendations are incredibly busy and geographically dispersed, making it virtually impossible to arrange face-to-face engagements. The policy Delphi approach also eliminates the negative group effects such as dominance by the minority, groupthink, and low productivity that are demonstrated in classical interaction group approaches (Hasson & Keeney, 2011). Interviews and case studies were also considered, but ultimately not selected as the primary method to answer these questions because they are by nature time-intensive and require the researcher to be in the same location as the subject.

This policy Delphi study was grounded in an interpretivist perspective, which is the appropriate frame since the goal was to conduct a guided exploration of varying perspectives and possible futures for the liberal arts in higher education in the United States. This system of inquiry aimed to elicit both probable and preferred futures, welcoming any type of information that might surface important aspects of the issue worthy of consideration, no matter how disparate the views may have been (Tapio et al., 2011). Quantitative researchers might be preoccupied with the need to prove the validity and reliability of the method, but that was not highly relevant to this study as I was not seeking to generalize the findings to a larger population (validity) and the reliability was enhanced by the elimination of group bias and groupthink thanks to the anonymous nature of the approach. Unlike the classical Delphi and decision Delphi, the policy Delphi allowed me to gain a more holistic understanding of the pros and cons of a

broad spectrum of viewpoints, which supported the creation of an informed array of policy options.

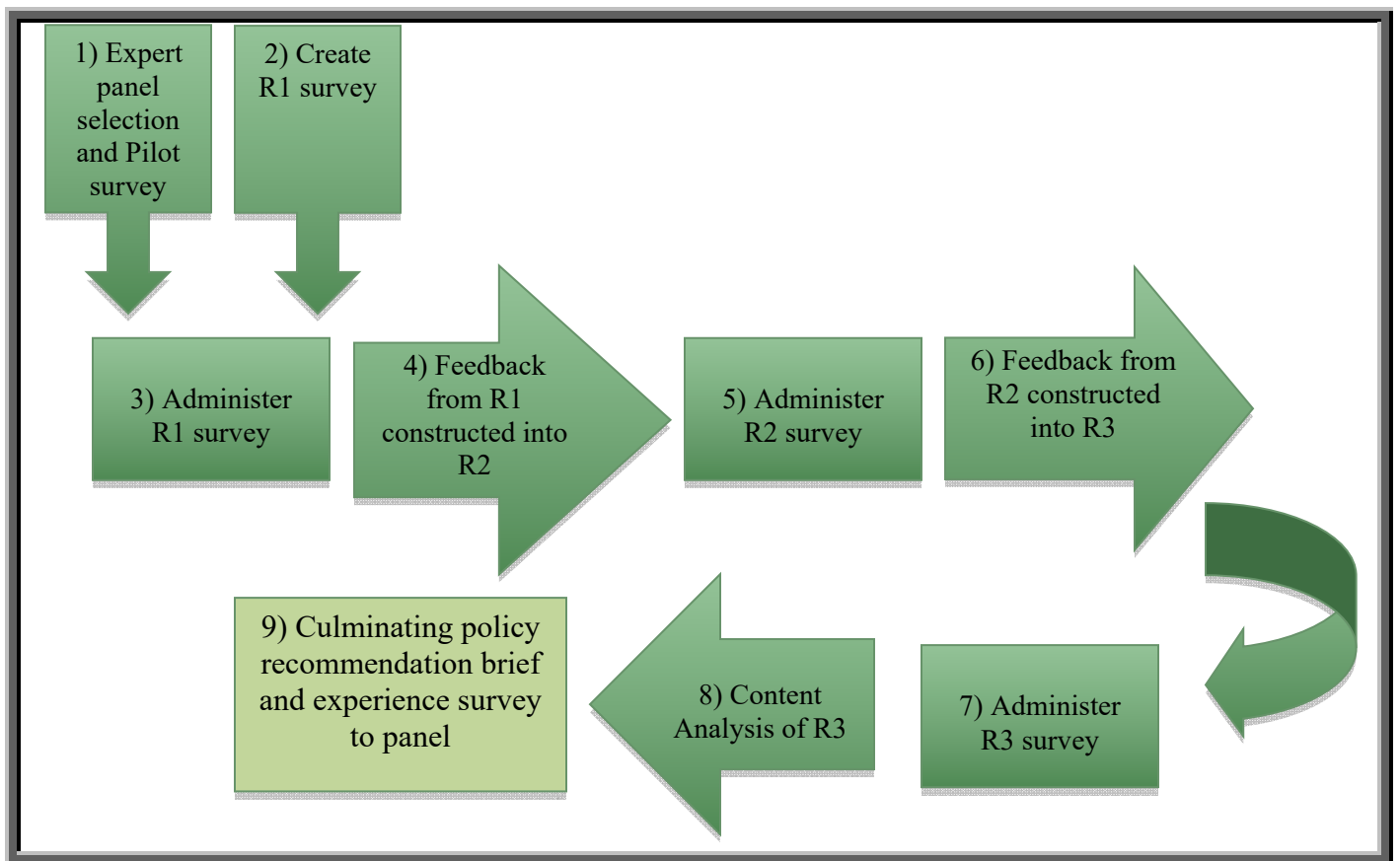
The policy question posed in this study required engaging a diverse panel of experts from institutions in multiple locales, in multiple iterations of comment and feedback. Following a review of the literature on Delphi types and modifications, I determined that the best fit for the purposes of this study was the policy Delphi utilizing email and online methods for communication and survey administration. The transition from paper-pencil surveys to online survey platforms has dramatically reduced the overall cost of administration and increased the level of convenience for both the researcher and the panelists. The virtual nature of the online Delphi has created a survey environment that allows panelists to simply click on a survey link embedded in the invitation emails and respond to each survey round at their leisure from the comfort of their homes and offices. There was even an option to save and return to the survey later. Overall, the policy Delphi was selected because it promised to be an efficient, cost-effective tool for bringing together the brightest leaders and experts from across the country into a single decision-making process at minimal cost to them, in terms of time and inconvenience.

Study Sequence and Timeline

After considering the various Delphi administration models reviewed in the literature, I created the following study sequence (Figure 1) as the best fit for this study given the time constraints of the expert panel and intended use of the findings. Since the purpose of this policy Delphi was to facilitate the creation of expert-level policy recommendations, including the pros, cons, desirability and feasibility of said array of recommendations, and not to facilitate consensus (as is the goal with most traditional Delphi studies), I was able to establish a predetermined number of survey rounds. The Round One survey was designed to establish a

broad understanding of the current policy landscape for liberal arts programs. The Round Two survey provided feedback from Round One with a refined set of questions designed to move the panel closer to a set of policy recommendations to be provided in the third and final survey round.

Figure 1. Policy Delphi Survey Sequence



The literature does not prescribe specific timelines for survey administration, but a suggested practice is to allow no more than two weeks to lapse between the administrations of each survey round. The general guidance is to complete the administration within 45 days, which was a reasonable goal for this study as the planned number of survey iterations was

limited to three (Delbeq et al., 1975). All communications with the panel were conducted through email and the surveys were administered via a secure online survey administration platform. All five surveys (Pilot, Round One, Round Two, Round Three, and Experience Survey) were hosted by the online survey tool Survey Share. This platform is provided to University of Hawai‘i faculty, staff and students at no cost and has been reviewed by the Office of Data Governance to ensure that it complies with UH privacy policies. This tool was fairly simple to use without the need for any additional training. The only drawback were the limited options for data exportation and presentation.

Figure 2. Policy Delphi Administration Timeline

Date	Event
Fall 2018	Selected expert panel through snowball sampling.
November 21, 2018	Invitation email sent to prospective panelists identified by initial purposeful sampling and subsequent snowball recommendations. Confirmation email sent to each invitation respondent. 41 experts agreed to complete all three survey rounds.
December 4, 2018	Pilot Survey administered (7 respondents).
January 10, 2019	Detailed email with study timeline and consent information sent to 41 panelists.
January 14, 2019	Round One invitation email with survey link sent to 41 panelists.
February 5, 2019	Round Two invitation email with survey link sent to 33 respondents to Round One.
February 26, 2019	Round Three invitation email with survey link sent to 30 respondents to Round Two.
April 29, 2019	Thank you email including link experience survey and culminating policy brief sent to 21 respondents to Round Three.

Panel Selection

There is no clear best practice in the literature regarding a minimum standard for panel size, but panelist attrition is always a concern with Delphi studies due to the time commitment generally asked of participants, so beginning with a larger panel is optimal. The quality of and representation within the panel is crucial. The guidance from the literature stresses the importance of selecting panelists who are experts in the subject matter area in question. To ensure that this panel would be truly expert, purposeful snowball or cascade sampling was utilized since experts and leaders in the field of education policy are part of a network that is best accessed from within. It was necessary for this Delphi panel to consist of leaders and experts engaged with higher education in varying capacities in order to produce robust, reliable results. Prominent higher education leaders from California, Colorado, Hawaii, Texas, Wisconsin, and Washington D.C. were consulted and asked to provide a list of suitable experts for the panel. Several of these panelists provided additional names, so the final panel consisted of a well-rounded group of experts from several types of leadership positions and various geographical locations.

I selected panelists for their roles relative to campus leadership, research and policy/advocacy work as well as their breadth of understanding and experience within the academy. The final panel consisted of leaders and experts from several key areas in higher education including accreditation commissioners and board members; leadership and policy scholars from higher education policy and advocacy organizations; and campus leaders including chancellors, presidents, provosts, deans and faculty experts. My presumption was that presidents and provosts would likely wish to preserve liberal arts education, which would be evidenced in their responses; accreditation professionals, though mostly from the academy, would bring a

different prospective as a result of their deeper understanding of the accreditation process and associated mandates from the federal government; and policy scholars would hopefully round out the field by providing a multi-faceted depth of understanding and knowledge of the national education policy terrain with its many issues and obstacles. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of the policy Delphi is not to gain consensus, but rather to assemble detailed perspectives of various expert stakeholders. This heterogeneous expert panel was able to bring a breadth of understanding and diverse perspectives with the collective expertise to generate a broad spectrum of robust policy options to address the policy problem with a thorough treatment of the pros, cons and relative tradeoffs of each. Once the panelist candidates were identified, an email invitation was sent (Appendix B) that clearly and succinctly detailed the reason for their selection, the precise expectations for panelist participation, and the way in which study findings would be utilized and communicated. Care was taken to convey to participants that the time commitment was not open-ended and that upon completion of a finite number of rounds (three), the study would be concluded within the prescribed time frame regardless of the final outcomes (Bloor et al., 2015).

Policy Delphi Survey Design

Survey creation and analysis were critical elements of the project design. Most of the questions in the Round One survey were directly informed by my literature review of academic capitalism and liberal arts education. Additionally, several higher education leaders, including members of my dissertation committee, were consulted throughout the design phase. Per the guidance from the literature, I chose to conduct a pilot study to refine the Round One survey questions. This type of preliminary “scoping” is recommended to help resolve issues with survey wording and length (Frewer et al., 2011). This preliminary phase of the survey design process

was essential to minimize the overall duration of the policy Delphi administration, and improve the panelist experience with the final Round One survey by ensuring that unnecessary, redundant, and poorly worded items were removed and revised proactively rather than reactively. The Round One questions were refined and improved based on the Pilot Survey, the Round Two questions were based on the summary of findings from Round One, and the Round Three survey was based on the findings from Round Two. The culminating policy brief that was provided to panelists was the result primarily of the findings from Round Three, but contained information from Round One and Round Two where relevant. This organic, iterative process of analysis and reframing key issues resulted in a robust “conversation” among panelists.

The data from all three survey rounds were coded into categories and themes that were then distilled into policy issues, and later policy solutions. This method of qualitative coding enables the researcher to systematically group the data based on shared characteristics, which can then be placed into categories, which can be utilized in further analytic synthesis (Saldana, 2016). The categories identified through the analysis of each survey round logically led to the creation of new items to be utilized in subsequent survey rounds and in the culminating policy brief. Since the amount of data from each survey round was manageable in size, the data were coded by hand rather than via coding software.

Pilot Survey

Seven participants who work in higher education administration completed the pilot survey, four of whom were psychometrically trained and work on institutional research and/or assessment. Respondents were asked to answer the questions and provide feedback on the flow, required time to complete, and structure/wording of the survey questions. The feedback from the pilot survey was very helpful. Two participants indicated that several of the questions contained

leading or biased language and provided suggestions for rewording to make the questions more neutral. In the end, over half of the questions were modified before administration of the Round One survey. This additional check on the Round One survey prior to administration helped ensure that items did not inadvertently steer the panel into the direction of the preexisting perspectives of the researcher (Davidson, 2013).

Round One Survey

The Round One survey (Appendix F) was designed to be completed within 30 minutes, although several panelists indicated in their responses that it took longer to complete than they had anticipated. It consisted of seven open-ended questions, three Likert-scale questions with four possible responses, and four demographic questions. A blank space followed each question to provide an opportunity for panelists to qualify their responses and provide additional comments so as not to limit their ability to fully express their thinking (Nowack, Endrikat, & Guenther, 2011). The Round One survey was distributed to the panel via an email that contained a link directly to the online survey. Of the original 41 panelists who agreed to participate, 33 responded to the survey within the prescribed one-week administration window.

The responses from Round One were analyzed using thematic content analysis for open-ended questions and descriptive statistics for multiple-choice questions. The goal was to comprehensively but succinctly capture the main ideas shared by the panelists and group them into themes that would then be incorporated into the next survey round. A summary of the themes and statistical results from Round One (Appendix G) were shared back with survey participants along with the email invitation that included an embedded link to the Round Two survey.

Round Two Survey

The Round Two survey (Appendix H) was constructed in response to the findings from Round One. It consisted of two main sections. The first section contained a Likert scale question with 11 problem statements that were taken from the thematic summary of the panelist's responses to three of the Round One survey questions that asked, "How has the higher education landscape for liberal arts programs changed over the last several decades? What causes would you attribute those changes to?"; "In your view, why are liberal arts program enrollments decreasing?"; and "Should the preservation and promotion of liberal arts programs be a priority for campus leaders? Please explain your answer." The second section contained 11 statements that were synthesized through the thematic analysis of the following question from the Round One survey, "What policy tools might higher education leaders leverage if they endeavor to ensure that liberal arts programs are preserved? How might these tools be employed? Please be specific." Each of the 11 items represented possible policy options that could eventually serve as components of the culminating policy recommendation brief. Round Two was only sent to those panelists who completed the Round One survey. In the Round Two survey, panelists were asked to share their rationale for ranking the items as they did in relation to the other items. The Round Two survey was completed by 30 of the 33 panelists who were invited to complete it. The responses from Round Two were collapsed into a smaller number of thematic areas in the form of specific policy options to be utilized in the Round Three survey.

Round Three Survey

The Round Two results were thematically analyzed and synthesized into a set of six distinct, comprehensive policy options designed for higher education leaders. In the Round Three survey (Appendix I), the panel was asked to select their top three policy options of these six, and

elaborate on the key elements including trade-offs, pros, cons and urgency for each of the selections. Round Three was only sent to those panelists who completed the Round Two survey. Of the 30 panelists who were invited to participate in the Round Three survey, 21 completed. A descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on the quantitative items and content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative explanations for each policy option. The responses from Round Three were used to create the culminating policy recommendation brief.

Culminating Policy Recommendation Brief

A summary brief of the top policy recommendation, pros, cons and trade-offs (Appendix J) was shared with the entire panel at the conclusion of the study to create a sense of closure and accomplishment and to provide an opportunity for them to offer feedback on the final product. The brief was sent only to those panelists who completed all three survey rounds. To help inform my second research question, the panelists were asked to share their thoughts on the policy Delphi process via a link to an experience survey which was used as a tool to judge the effectiveness of the Delphi instrument in achieving the goals of the study.

Criteria for Assessment

It was necessary to identify criteria by which to evaluate whether the policy Delphi method was an effective tool for gathering expert opinions about policy options to inform the policy decisions of higher education leaders. The findings would have implications not only for this study, but potentially for future policy studies as well. Following are the key preparatory elements considered prior to the administration of the policy Delphi, and a discussion of the criteria and assessment tools that utilized.

Before generating the criteria by which to assess the effectiveness of this policy Delphi, several elements had to be carefully considered and constructed. These preconditions were in

place to ensure that the results of the policy Delphi were not contaminated by poor design preparation. One of the most common criticisms of the Delphi method is not of the tool itself, but of the researcher's application of the process, particularly in the areas of panel selection, communication with participants throughout the survey rounds, and during data analysis (Landeta, 2006). Each of these issues were considered during the design phase of the study.

The policy Delphi is person- and situation-specific and therefore each application is unique. The only effective way to assess the accuracy and reliability of such a study is to judge it against other methods that utilize various comparable structured group decision processes (Lang, 1995). For geographical, financial and temporal reasons, it is not feasible to conduct such a comparative analysis however an alternate solution was applied with the goal of achieving similar ends. In order to ensure the methodological rigor of a Delphi study, it is crucial to maintain a record of all relevant theoretical, methodological, and analytical decisions made throughout the course of the study, from planning to analysis (Skulmoski, Hartman & Krahn, 2007). In alignment with this recommendation, my study design incorporated the use of an audit journal, which contained documentation of all key decisions, processes, issues and communications from each stage of the study.

It is important to note that the policy Delphi panelists are also the intended end users of the policy recommendations. Most occupy senior executive leadership positions (presidents, provosts, deans, etc.), which makes their feedback key in assessing how effective the policy Delphi process was in generating a comprehensive, informative, and useful policy brief. Perhaps more important were their comments regarding whether the policy recommendations would inform their own policy decisions at their institutions. The criteria for assessment were as follows:

- 1) Did the policy Delphi facilitate the production of a comprehensive list of policy recommendations that address the first research question, including the benefits, drawbacks and trade-offs of each policy option?
- 2) Do the end-users (higher education leaders and decision-makers) value this policy Delphi process as an effective method for channeling expert opinions?
- 3) Will the intended end-user of the outcomes of this study (the culminating policy recommendation brief) find the policy recommendations relevant, robust, and useful? Will they endeavor to implement any of the recommendations?

Conducting an analysis of the final policy brief and relating it to the findings of the literature review informed the first criterion. The second and third criteria required additional tools of inquiry. At the conclusion of the three survey rounds, participants received the culminating policy brief along with an experience survey intended to produce useful evaluative information regarding how the process, purpose, and questions were perceived and experienced by the participants. The experience survey contained three multiple-choice and one open-ended questions. Data from the Delphi journal and the experience survey were triangulated with the results of the first three survey rounds to gain a rich response to address the three criteria stated above, and ultimately answer the question of whether the policy Delphi is an appropriate and effective tool for informing decision-making in higher education.

Limitations

The motivation for this study extends from my philosophical position in relation to the current dilemma facing higher education. As was stated above in my review of the literature, the researcher's interpretation of the survey results may be biased (Clayton, 1997). I draw attention to this issue to explicitly address my ongoing effort to avoid unintentionally biasing the study in

a direction aligned with my own views and beliefs. Delphi studies by nature are researcher intensive, as each stage requires analysis and synthesis, which then informs the next stage, and almost exclusively one individual performs these analyses. The purpose of this study is to produce actionable policy recommendations to higher education leaders based on the expert knowledge and predictions of one's peers, not to reinforce existing values and beliefs. Avoiding bias will be kept in mind throughout the course of this study. I kept notes in the Delphi journal, particularly in the survey creation and analysis stages, to provide an additional layer of reflection on the matter.

Another issue I paid close attention to throughout the study was survey attrition, as it tends to be problematic for Delphi studies in general (Hsu & Stanford, 2007). I made every effort to create a concise yet engaging set of surveys, but they nonetheless required a significant time commitment on the part of the panelists. My goal entering into this study was to maintain a representative panel of at least ten participants through completion of the three survey rounds, and I was very fortunate to have 21 participants by the end of the study.

Email feedback from two panelists who left the study early helped me to better understand areas where I could improve, and possibly reduce attrition in future administrations of the policy Delphi method. One respondent who initially agreed to participate chose not to after being granted an extension to complete Round One. He stated that the questions were far more time-intensive than he had anticipated and graciously bowed out of participation in the study. Another respondent who completed Rounds 1 and 2 emailed me to say that he would not be completing Round Three because his professional responsibilities had become too great. An important lesson to be drawn from these comments is that I should have more carefully tested and communicated how long each survey would take to complete. Of the 41 panelists who

agreed to participate, 21 actually completed all three survey rounds. However, the overall completion rate for panelists who began the study by completing Round One was 64%. This is a sufficiently high response rate and yielded significant amounts of rich qualitative data.

Working with Human Subjects

Institutional Review Board

This study was created and administered in accordance with the laws and regulations of the University of Hawai‘i. The full project design was submitted to the Institutional Review Board prior to the panelist selection. The Office of Research Compliance, Human Studies Program issued a Notice of Approval for Human Research on November 20, 2018 (Appendix A).

Participant Consent Form

Each panelist was provided with a participant consent form (Appendix C) which they acknowledged electronically by entering into the first round of the survey. In the language of the form, it is made clear to panelists that all necessary precautions would be taken to preserve their confidentiality and privacy.

Ethical Issues

The members of the expert panel were all high-level administrators and practitioners who were fully informed that their participation was voluntary and they could quit the study at any time with no loss or penalty to them. None of the participants disclosed any characteristics that would indicate they were vulnerable individuals, but care was taken with the wording of the survey questions, particularly the demographics section of the Round One survey, to ensure that it was inclusive and culturally-sensitive to individuals from diverse backgrounds and identity groups.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The purpose of this policy Delphi was to capture the expert opinions of prominent higher education experts and practitioners to create a set of policy recommendations intended to inform the long-term strategic planning and budget prioritization of campus leaders across the country. The policy problem this study seeks to inform is this: in the current market-driven political context of higher education, how can colleges and universities ensure that liberal arts education is preserved as a core component to their educational missions? The policy Delphi was selected to inform this problem because it can be designed to harness the collective expertise of busy leaders and practitioners who are geographically dispersed in a manner that is both efficient and cost-effective.

This policy Delphi study consisted of three iterative survey rounds. The Round One survey questions were developed through ideas and concepts discovered during my review of the literature that was aimed at addressing my first research question. The questions for Rounds 2 and 3 were developed directly through an analysis of each respective previous survey round. The effect of this methodological approach was to have a rich qualitative “conversation” with the panel in the Round One survey, which was analyzed and categorized into themes that were shared back with the panel for their consideration in the Round Two survey. Those results were refined into a set of distinct policy options in Round Three. The following chapter will provide a summary of all three rounds of the policy Delphi study including: 1) the development, administration, and analysis of the Round One survey, 2) the development of the Round One response summary, and the development, administration, and analysis of the Round Two survey, the development, administration, and analysis of the Round Three Survey, and the development and distribution of the summary brief.

As described in Chapter 3, the prospective panelists for this study were identified through snowball sampling. An invitation email (Appendix B) including the purpose of the study and precise dates of administration for all three survey rounds was sent to 57 people. Of the 57 invited, 41 individuals agreed to participate in all three rounds of the study; 33 completed the Round One survey; 30 completed the Round Two survey; and 21 completed the Round Three survey (see Table 1 below). In the design phase of this study, my goal was to maintain a panel of at least 10 individuals through all three survey rounds, so the final result of 21 was an excellent and unexpected outcome. Since there was not significant attrition within the panel over the three survey rounds the design successfully maintained a diverse array of perspectives from beginning to end.

Table 1. Respondent Participation in the Policy Delphi Study

Round	n
Invited and Agreed to Participate	41
Completed Round One	33
Completed Round Two	30
Completed Round Three	21

As was mentioned in Chapter II, panelist attrition is problematic in Delphi studies (Hsu & Stanford, 2007), yet this study enjoyed a reasonably high response rate of 63.6% from Round One to Round Three which yielded a great deal of rich, credible qualitative data throughout the three survey rounds. Only minor variations in the relative diversity of the panel took place over the course of the three survey rounds (see Table 2 below).

Table 2. Panel Characteristics

Demographic	Round 1 (n=33)		Round 2 (n=30)		Round 3 (n=21)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Position						
Faculty	7	21.2	7	23.3	4	19.0
Dean	4	12.1	4	13.3	2	9.5
Provost/VP/CAO	8	24.2	7	23.3	5	23.8
President/VP/AVP/Chanc.	5	15.2	5	16.7	4	19.0
Accreditor	2	6.1	2	6.7	2	9.5
Policy Consultant	6	18.2	4	13.3	3	14.3
Administrator	1	3.0	1	3.3	1	4.8
Years of Experience						
9-20	9	27.3	8	26.7	6	28.6
21-39	17	51.5	16	53.3	10	47.6
40+	7	21.2	6	20.0	5	23.8
Sex/Gender						
Female	17	51.5	16	53.3	11	52.4
Male	15	45.5	13	43.3	9	42.9
Prefer not to answer	1	3.0	1	3.3	1	4.8
Race/Ethnicity						
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin	3	9.1	3	10.0	2	9.5
White	24	78.8	21	70.0	14	66.7
Hawaiian	3	6.1	3	10.0	2	9.5
Portuguese Hawaiian-American	1	3.0	2	6.7	2	9.5
Prefer not to answer	2	3.0	1	3.3	1	4.8

Round One Survey Administration and Analysis

The invitation to complete the Round One survey was sent to the original 41 panelists via an email which contained the participant consent form (Appendix C) and an embedded link to the online survey. The survey tool required each participant to enter their email address before beginning the survey and they were able to save and return to the survey at their leisure. A reminder email was sent at the end of the one-week administration window. The majority of the panelists responded within the window, though a few people asked for (and were granted) extensions. It was ultimately completed by 33 panelists.

The Round One survey was designed to capture a broad understanding of the panelists' perceptions and beliefs regarding liberal arts education. Questions #1, #2, #3, #4, #7, #8, and #9 were open-ended. The remaining three questions were quantitative in nature. Following are the 10 questions (excluding the demographic questions which were presented in Table 1) that panelists were asked in the Round One survey (see Appendix F for Round One survey questions as they appeared in SurveyShare):

- 1) How has the higher education landscape for liberal arts programs changed over the last several decades? What causes would you attribute those changes to? (*OPEN-ENDED*)
- 2) In what ways do the liberal arts add value to the undergraduate experience (regardless of major)? (*OPEN-ENDED*)
- 3) In your view, why are liberal arts program enrollments decreasing? (*OPEN-ENDED*)
- 4) How are higher education leaders responding to decreasing enrollments in liberal arts programs? How *should* they be responding? (*OPEN-ENDED*)
- 5) Do you believe liberal arts programs are an indispensable part of the undergraduate curricular array at public and private baccalaureate, master's and doctoral institutions? Please explain your answer. (Yes, Probably yes, Probably no, Definitely no, Unsure-please explain)
- 6) To what extent should curricular array be determined by course enrollment and student demand for majors/programs? (To a great extent, To a moderate extent, To some extent, To no extent, No basis to judge/not sure)
- 7) Should the preservation and promotion of liberal arts programs be a priority for campus leaders? Please explain your answer. (*OPEN-ENDED*)
- 8) What external stakeholders (accreditors, politicians, think tanks, etc.) play a role in

determining the future of liberal arts in higher education? In what ways? (OPEN-ENDED)

9) What policy tools might higher education leaders leverage if they endeavor to ensure that liberal arts programs are preserved? How might these tools be employed? Please be specific. (OPEN-ENDED)

10) Do you believe reduced public funding signals that higher education is no longer broadly viewed as a public good? (Very true of what I believe, Somewhat true of what I believe, Somewhat untrue of what I believe, Very untrue of what I believe, Unsure)

11) Please list your current position.

12) Please indicate your total years of experience working in higher education.

13) Please indicate your gender.

(Female, Male, Prefer not to answer, Prefer to self-describe)

14) Prefer to self-describe

15) Additional comments:

Quantitative Question Analysis

The three quantitative questions in the Round One survey, #5, #6, and #10, were designed to capture a general sense of how the panelists felt about the role of liberal arts in higher education, their management style in response to decreased liberal arts course and program enrollments, and the public perception of higher education as a public good. The questions and responses are illustrated in Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5 below.

Question #5

The intent of question #5 was to capture the array of panelist opinions on the topic of the role of liberal arts in higher education today. The majority of the panelists who responded to this

question (22) indicated “yes”, they did believe liberal arts programs are an indispensable part of the curricular array, while an additional four said, “probably yes” (see Table 3 below). An additional six panelists did not respond to the Likert but responded affirmatively in the comment section, while one responded that they thought the liberal arts curriculum had lost its coherence.

Table 3. The Indispensability of Liberal Arts Programs

Question	Number of responses in each category				
	Yes	Probably yes	Probably no	Definitely no	Unsure
5) Do you believe liberal arts programs are an indispensable part of the undergraduate curricular array at public and private baccalaureate, master’s and doctoral institutions? Please explain your answer.	22	4	0	0	0

The qualitative responses to the question provided a deeper sense of the affirmative quantitative responses:

“These programs provide general education courses that are foundational to future skill development and specialization in the majors.”

“They make for well-rounded citizens, they provide context for narrower technical knowledge and skills and they help individuals to understand the connections of what they are doing to a broader world.”

“Students should learn more than skills at universities. The liberal arts teach them to become more critical thinkers and to discover new passions.

“Democracy depends on it.”

Collectively, these responses to this question demonstrate that the entire panel holds a shared sentiment that liberal arts programs are very important. This finding is relevant to this

study because it is the premise upon which this dissertation is founded. If a large number of the panelists did not share this sentiment, it would have shaped a different set of policy priorities altogether.

Question #6

Question #6 was designed to gain a sense of whether panelists believed that decreased enrollments in liberal arts program should be responded to by contracting the program.

Table 4. The Relationship between Enrollment and Curricular Array

Question	Number of responses in each category				
	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	To some extent	To no extent	No basis to judge/not sure
6) To what extent should curricular array be determined by course enrollment and student demand for majors/programs?	2	9	20	1	1

At many institutions this is done by reducing the number of faculty in certain departments, cancelling classes, stopping-out programs, and in some cases by eliminating majors entirely. Since the majority of the panelists responded “to some extent” (20), I had to look to the rich qualitative comments that were written to help qualify the panelists’ thinking. Qualitative responses included the following:

“Student demand will always be important, but universities are not simply education markets. Distribution requirements assure that they will be exposed to new ideas and ways of thinking. Often students don’t know what they’re interested in until they discover it through a course.”

“I think that students have little idea what they should be learning, and will enroll in courses that are required for the major, needed to get a degree, meet at the right time, and where they expect to do well, and not courses that challenge their thinking or help to open up new areas. I think a return to a structured curriculum, at least for the first year if not the first two years, would be a good thing pedagogically. It would also be more cost-effective than the current proliferation of course titles is.”

“Obviously, you should not offer 10 sections of a course if only 10 students enroll in it. But consistent offerings help students know what is available to them. There is also the fact that other majors leave room in their degree for courses that are outside of the major.”

“...demand for courses, like demand for programs of study, should have little impact on the array of curricular offerings. The mantra is that curriculum belongs to the faculty- usually said in contrast to administrators, but I think just as applicable in contrast to students. The people who came to us for a college education don’t know what they don’t know...I think the need for educators to set expectations for a broad, liberal arts curriculum may be greater than ever, in a rapidly changing economy. Allowing students to confine themselves to technical subjects at the expense of the liberal arts could produce alumni who are almost immediately obsolescent.”

“Young people don’t know what we elders know. They need the freedom to choose their curriculum but we need to insist that they enroll in courses that teach something about life, ethics, love, passion, sacrifice, grief, loneliness, temptation, forgiveness.”

As is evidenced by this sample of the qualitative responses, regardless of the quantitative response, the majority of the panelists were clearly in support of maintaining a broad curricular array for students to access, in most cases for reasons driven by philosophical and pedagogical integrity.

Question #10

Question #10 was designed to capture the panelists' perspectives on a highly contentious policy issue in higher education today: is it a public good?

Table 5. Changes in Government Funding and Higher Education as a Public Good

Question	Number of responses in each category				
	Very true of what I believe	Somewhat true of what I believe	Somewhat untrue of what I believe	Very untrue of what I believe	Unsure
10) Do you believe reduced public funding signals that higher education is no longer broadly viewed as a public good?	9	15	5	4	0

The views of the panel were mixed, as can be seen in the quantitative data in table 5. The following qualitative responses paint a fuller picture:

“I believe politicians believe it is an expendable public good. I think higher education is broadly viewed as a public good but one that is expensive and has little oversight.”

“I think reduced funding is a function of: 1. An aversion to increased taxes. 2. Competition for funding from other types of programs, particularly health care. 3. The reality that higher education is one of the few state programs with an alternative funding source—the students themselves.”

“Much of the perception is driven by an anti-intellectual rhetoric that equates higher education with elitism.”

“I think the idea of ‘public good’ has been reoriented. In the post-WWII era, it was seen as a general good for the country and supported out of public funds. Now the ‘public good’ has

been narrowed to a neoliberal, privatized notion—it is a public good to encourage private individuals to develop their market potential, like a business start-up. So everyone now is their own business (hence the stress on becoming entrepreneurs rather than citizens), and the public serves, like the NFL, to sponsor the competitive market. Rather than being something else.”

“No, I think it signals that politicians have competing interests that vie for their attention, votes and funding allocations. Those who get the biggest pieces of the federal budget have huge and very powerful lobbying industries. I think reduced spending on higher education is motivated economically by these competing interests now [sic] how it is regarded.”

As can be seen in this sampling of the qualitative responses, some panelists believed it is now viewed as a private good, others believed it is still viewed as a public good but there is a lack of public resources to support it, and still others believed that the real answer falls somewhere in between.

These three topics tend to invoke rather polarized responses in the higher education community, so they were added to the first survey to produce simple descriptive statistics that would help illuminate the general character of the panel to provide context for the qualitative responses. What these findings demonstrated was that the majority of the panel valued liberal arts education as core to the mission of higher education, regardless of decreasing course enrollments. Furthermore, the majority of the panel believed that higher education is no longer viewed as a public good— an issue that is identified in the qualitative responses as a problem that higher education leaders should focus on addressing. Many of the qualitative responses were quote-worthy and inspirational, and the overall the findings demonstrate that the panel is generally philosophically aligned with the spirit that drives this study.

Qualitative Question Analysis

Data from each qualitative question (#1, #2, #3, #4, #7, #8, and #9) was coded and analyzed. Once coding was complete for all seven qualitative questions, categories were created to logically group each individual item by shared characteristics. Nine primary themes arose, one with multiple subcategories. Since all of the qualitative questions were interrelated and dealt with the topic of the future of liberal arts in higher education, several respondents provided overlapping and sometimes redundant responses. As a result, the categories and themes transcended the question boundaries, so the analysis was conducted holistically. The rich narrative data from all seven qualitative questions was coded into categories, from which themes were ultimately identified.

Nine overarching themes were discovered during the Round One survey analysis. Themes I-VII contain detailed information regarding the key issues and conditions that have created the policy problem that this study seeks to address: the decreasing demand for liberal arts education in American higher education. Theme VIII details the way higher education leaders have responded to the policy problem, and theme IX provides guidance for higher education leaders on the best way forward. A broad category that pervades many of the themes throughout the Round One survey blames the current political atmosphere as a root cause of many of the reputational problems higher education and the liberal arts are facing today. This critique of the current political environment was eloquently captured by one panelist as follows, “[t]he increasing politicization and anti-intellectualism of the current era has contributed to increased misunderstanding and skepticism regarding the value of the liberal arts.”

Theme I: Shifting Perception of the Purpose of Higher Education

Panelists pointed to a variety of factors that contributed to the shifting perception of the value and purpose of higher education. One panelist blamed secondary education for not doing enough to foster an appreciation of the liberal arts and subsequently students and their families do not view liberal education as a priority when considering their postsecondary options.

Another panelist commented on the damage that is done by conservative politicians conflating liberal education with a liberal-biased political agenda. Still another panelist bluntly stated that young people have not experienced enough life to understand what they truly want. Several panelists discussed financial factors such as wage stagnation, increasing tuition, and reduced public funding as significant contributing factors (these will be discussed in greater detail in Theme II below). The majority of responses were related to the increased focus on workforce outcomes as well as the underlying reasons for this increased focus, which can be disaggregated into several sub-categories.

The commodification of higher education and concerns about increasing materialism was evident in many panelist responses. To this point, one panelist referred to the “elevation of the entrepreneurial vision of higher learning” as a root cause of the changing landscape. Another echoed this sentiment by saying, “[t]here has been a decreased emphasis on education for personal development/improvement, less emphasis on the liberal arts, and increased emphasis on education for personal (\$) return and economic development.” Several of the panelists expressed concern that the value of higher education had become strictly monetary. The purpose has shifted from “education for the life of the mind to [a] career preparation focus.” Multiple panelists commented on the relatively new conception of the purpose of higher education as a vehicle for obtaining a high-paying job. One panelist commented on this phenomenon as follows, “[t]he

high cost of an undergraduate education, triggering high student debt, is one cause. Another may be the greater social pressure to be ‘practical’ rather than to explore, follow one’s passion, and develop the critical thinking that a liberal education has long been structured to teach.” Another panelist pointed out that this focus on workforce outcomes deemphasizes the liberal arts skills that will ultimately support graduates as they navigate numerous, diverse jobs over the course of their lives.

Another issue that was identified was the preference for STEM over liberal arts programs. One panelist noted that students, especially underrepresented minorities and females, are encouraged to enter STEM fields and pre-professional programs, which is a good thing, but that it has negative consequences for the liberal arts. Another panelist pointed out that students in STEM fields are lauded, while liberal arts majors (and their disciplines) are openly denigrated. According to another panelist, STEM fields and economics have been a “policy favorite” of leaders and have consistently received support while the liberal arts disciplines languish. As STEM and professional programs receive favored treatment and advising preference, according to one panelist, the support for understanding linkages between liberal arts majors and careers is virtually non-existent, in part because career advising is often in student affairs not academic affairs.

Theme II: Financial Issues

The impact of various financial issues on liberal arts education was noted frequently in the panel responses. Several panelists blamed wage stagnation, the Great Recession and the related financial and employment instability for students’ and parents’ shifting preferences for STEM and professional programs over liberal arts disciplines. According to one panelist, “What happens with an economic shift like this is that the privileged (in terms of income and social

status) are given priority because an education is achievable only for them. When this is the case, economic determinism takes over. Students are counseled to select STEM majors in order to find happiness since liberal arts majors will not lead to a living wage. Students are driven to go into majors that sell themselves as promoting employability.”

One panelist placed fault on the government for defunding higher education and placing the burden on the individual, demonstrating loss of the belief that higher education is a public good. Several panelists pointed out that decreased state funding has caused tuition levels to skyrocket in recent decades, and the subsequent student loan crisis has scared students into pursuing the academic pathway that they are told will yield the greatest financial rates of return. Furthermore, the majority of scholarship aid is offered in STEM disciplines. From a funding perspective, one panelist discussed the fact that federal funding for the humanities has declined since the Reagan era, while science funding has flourished. This funding/defunding model is reflected at many institutions in budget prioritization processes.

Theme III: Media and Political Rhetoric

Several panelists identified rhetorical attacks on higher education by media and politicians as a destructive force that higher education needs to better manage in light of decreasing enrollments and funding for liberal arts education. One panelist commented on the political backlash against the liberal arts as “esoteric, elitist and unnecessary, views exacerbated by the 2008 recessions and the countries [sic] divisive political context.” Several panelists pointed to fact that those deriding higher education are frequently wielding misleading data about the correlation between majors and salaries/jobs. Legislators and other politicians have questioned the value of liberal arts degrees stating that they have no practical outcomes. This negatively shapes media and public perceptions of liberal arts as a waste of public funds, not

worth the financial investment required of students and their families. One panelist referred to a national trend of “hysteria” pressuring students and families to view undergraduate education as pre-professional/vocational. The media is adding to negative narratives about the value of liberal arts education by exploiting negative portrayals of student employment outcomes for liberal arts graduates.

Theme IV: Faculty Issues

This theme contains three key issues related to the ways in which faculty are contributing to the problem of reduced enrollments in liberal arts courses and programs: problematic personnel practices, curricular stagnation/irrelevance, and graduate education. Several panelists pointed out that faculty personnel practices have created an atmosphere of stagnation whereby many faculty beyond retirement age continue teaching courses that are no longer relevant to students of today. With fewer faculty hires in the humanities and no mandatory retirement policies, tenured faculty are continuing to teach courses with low (or no) enrollments. One panelist believed that some faculty were more interested in their own research than they were in “robust student learning experiences or outcomes.” These faculty demonstrate reluctance to “rethink and redesign” curricula to make subjects more appealing to students.

Curricular redesign discussions, which are occurring at campuses across the country, are often characterized by a contentious battle waged between faculty and administration. One panelist accused faculty of being overly focused on their own prestige and “intellectual heft” within their disciplines to the detriment of student learning within their programs. Another panelist pointed out that “[t]he cynicism generated by internal debates has permeated public discourse; when support for the liberal arts is seen as self-serving on the part of faculty, the public is more likely to doubt the intrinsic value of these programs/courses.”

Another issue cited by several panelists was in the area of graduate education. One panelist argued that graduate education is not aligned with current curricular trends and that new faculty are not adequately prepared to engage their students holistically around the liberal arts. This is in large part because during their graduate careers they were acutely focused on their own research interests so they are not prepared to truly engage with students around the value and power of the liberal arts. Another panelist highlighted the issue of over-production of PhDs leading to surplus faculty labor creating a “system [that] subsidizes the research of professors who do not want to teach.”

Theme V: Changing Times: Technology and Diversity

This theme contains two sub-categories: changing technology and increasing student diversity. These were grouped under a single theme because although neither of them had a significantly large number of comments from the panel, both have a shared quality of facing increasing momentum that needs to be addressed by the liberal arts disciplines, and higher education in general, in order to remain relevant.

Regarding technology, one panelist commented on how the tech-driven economy has inspired many students to pursue technical education as a more practical alternative to liberal arts majors. A small number of panelists commented on the ways in which evolving technologies are impacting the way students learn. Primary and secondary schools have more quickly adapted to the use of multi-media educational technologies including film and visual modalities that place less emphasis on reading and writing. This shift will continue to have a significant impact on the humanities. Another panelist carried this line of reasoning a step further by considering the ways in which computers and the internet are transforming the way our minds consume, process and

store information, even going so far as to compare their cultural significance to the invention of the printing press.

The second sub-category is student diversity. One panelist suggested that an increasingly diverse student body is challenging some of the more traditional points of view in the liberal arts. This sentiment was echoed by several additional panelists who suggested that liberal arts departments in general have failed to redesign their curriculum and programs to meet the needs of diverse student populations. This includes first generation students who are attending post-secondary institutions at increasing levels yet their representation in liberal arts programs is proportionately low. One panelist suggested that the curriculum is perceived as irrelevant to students from diverse backgrounds, and that it required redesign to bring it up to current standards. Another noted, “the changing demographics of students—more diverse—has challenged the traditional point of view of liberal arts programs—Western/European and male-centric—has also changed the landscape.”

Theme VI: General Education

This theme represents a slight departure from themes I-V in that it captures issues surrounding general education, which is closely linked to liberal arts education, but is still somewhat adjacent to the policy problem which this study aims to address. Nonetheless, this theme is germane to the overall enrollment issues liberal arts schools and colleges are facing therefore it is worthy of inclusion here.

According to several panelists, enrollments in general education courses (the majority of which are offered by liberal arts faculty) are dropping for a variety of reasons. The waiver of general education requirements is particularly problematic in professional programs, which commonly have a larger number of in-program requirements than most liberal arts majors. This

waiver is justified as a way to address cost and time-to-degree that would directly impact students. This problem, referred to by one panelist as a “disaggregation of degrees”, creates an atmosphere of competition among liberal arts departments as they compete for resources that are tied to student enrollment numbers.

Still other panelists found hope in current examples from their institutions and others. One panelist commented on the movement at many institutions to strengthen general education requirements by making the study of world cultures and diversity studies more robust and relevant. Along these same lines, another panelist commented on how general education coursework was once considered introductory “in the disciplines” but that some institutions are now thematically linking upper-division general education coursework to majors in ways that are relevant to both civic and professional preparation. There is a lack of coherent linkage between general education courses and student major (by academic advisors, counselors, administrators and commutation units) that needs to be addressed.

Theme VII: Effective Dissemination of Positive Research

Several panelists noted their consternation with the public perception that liberal arts degrees do not lead to career, despite, according to one panelist, the “powerful body of research” that links graduates of liberal arts disciplines to various positive outcomes. Another panelist commented that the American Association of Colleges & Universities had done excellent work, “naming the liberal arts earnings associated with career preparation” and yet enrollments have failed to respond. Nonetheless, what another panelist referred to as the “drumbeat of complaint that the humanities and arts don’t lead to jobs” continues to dominate political and media discourse. Administrators have done a poor job messaging that liberal arts and professional education are not at odds, rather they strengthen one another.

Theme VIII: Current Response of Higher Education Leaders

Several panelists expressed concern that higher education leaders were not effectively communicating or promoting the value of liberal arts degrees in delivering skills that would help students be marketable following graduation. One panelist argued that higher education leaders had taken public support for granted and “been slow to mount campaigns putting forward positive, counter narratives.” Others said that institutions are not well-invested in “explaining the connections between interest areas and major.” Thus, the number of students selecting those majors is decreasing.

Several panelists were concerned that administrators were driving “top-down” initiatives focused on workforce training under pressure from legislators and boards. Administrators are defaulting to a business model that takes an “accounting view” of decreasing liberal arts enrollments and “tinkering” with pricing and aid models. This approach has led to liberal arts departments being merged and eliminated, programs being closed, and funding and support following high-demand majors and programs. They are turning attention away from the liberal arts to the majors where demand is increasing (STEM, professional programs, etc.), as they increasingly view students as consumers. One panelist noted that instead of contracting liberal arts programs as enrollments decrease, administrators should view it as an opportunity to support curricular innovation and improvement.

Not all the panelist comments regarding higher education leadership was negative. Several commented that they are doing their best given scarce resources and enormous internal and external pressure. Others pointed out that there are promising examples of good leadership where communication of the value of liberal arts programs is being encouraged at different levels across campus and in public forums with regents, alumni and the legislature.

Theme IX: Policy Solutions for Higher Education Leaders

Several panelists pointed to the need for liberal arts programs to be more innovative and integrate human and technical skills to prepare graduates to be nimble in a dynamic job market. One panelist commented, “[t]hey should change the content of programs to make them more workplace relevant—add technical writing to English programs, ethics to philosophy, business to the arts, etc.” Another panelist provided the example of linking philosophy and business (ethics), to nursing and personal philosophy. Many panelists supported the concept of increasing departmental capacity to revise the curriculum to help connect liberal arts courses and majors to professional programs. Campus leaders should be focused on reorganizing curricula and programs rather than letting demand influence resources and contracting programs with low enrollments as a response to fluctuation.

Some panelists expressed the view that the liberal arts should be preserved in something like their current form. Conversely, many panelists pointed out the importance of not strictly defending the disciplines, but rather encouraging innovation and transformation within the disciplines to blend the liberal arts with career fields and STEM and teaching the real-world applications of the skills and knowledge gained in liberal arts courses and programs. This thinking was articulated by one panelist as follows, “[w]hen the liberal arts are ‘applied’ to significant questions, their value doesn’t need to ‘be defended’. It speaks powerfully for itself.” But the programs need to do a better job of demonstrating their relevance to contemporary student populations.

Campus leaders should champion new initiatives and centers that place liberal arts at the core of research, programming and education. Others discussed the need to promote faculty diversity. Many of the comments were related to the way in which higher education

communicates the value of the liberal arts, and encouraged leaders to follow strategies that reposition IHEs as “co-creators” with the community to find solutions to pressing social problems. This links the current role of higher education more explicitly to its original mission of serving the public good, supporting the argument for increased government funding.

Round Two Survey Administration and Analysis

The invitation to complete the Round Two survey was sent to the 33 panelists that responded to the Round One survey via an email containing an embedded link to the online survey. As with Round One, the participants were required to enter their email address to begin the survey which they were able to save and return to at any time. A reminder email was sent at the end of the one-week administration window. As with Round One, the majority of the panelists responded within the window, though a few people asked for (and were granted) extensions. The survey was ultimately completed by 30 of the 33 panelists who completed Round One.

The Round Two survey was based on the panelist responses to the Round One survey. In particular, the thematic qualitative responses to Round One were analyzed and coded into a set of new questions. Following are the three questions panelists were asked in the Round Two survey (see Appendix H for Round Two survey questions as they appeared in SurveyShare):

- 1) Please indicate to what extent you believe each of the following items impact demand and enrollment in liberal arts programs and courses. Please feel free to expand on any of your responses in the space provided below.

(to a great extent, to some extent, to no extent, N/A)

- a) Aftershock of 2008 recession and wage stagnation causing students to focus more on employment outcomes of higher education.

- b) Influence of business and industry on higher education decision-making.
 - c) Growing materialism and perception of the purpose of HE as workforce preparation.
 - d) Political and media rhetoric that liberal arts are "esoteric, elitist, and unnecessary."
 - e) Political and media rhetoric that liberal arts majors do not lead to high-paying jobs (following graduation).
 - f) HE leaders are not effectively conveying the value of liberal arts in relation to both civic and career preparation.
 - g) HE leaders are not effectively leveraging the body of research linking LA majors to positive career outcomes.
 - h) Reluctance of LA departments to rethink, redesign and innovate their programs to increase relevance and student appeal.
 - i) Faculty focus too heavily on research interests rather than ensuring "robust student learning experiences or outcomes."
 - j) Increasingly diverse student body challenging traditional LA curriculum, viewpoints, and relevance to them.
 - k) Decreased public support for HE causing student debt burdens to increase creating urgency to link majors to immediate employment.
- 2) The following policy options were shared by panelists as ways in which campus leadership can address the decreasing demand and enrollments in liberal arts programs/courses. Please indicate to what extent you believe each item is desirable and important, regardless of cost. Please feel free to expand on any of your responses in the space provided below.
- (very desirable and very important, somewhat desirable and somewhat important, not

desirable or important, N/A)

- a) Provide support to fund and facilitate innovative redesign of LA programs to link them to professional programs.
- b) Create coherent, transdisciplinary thematic pathways based around specific learning themes linking upper-division general education coursework to be relevant to civic and professional preparation.
- c) Revitalize traditional LA courses to be more relevant to diverse student populations and develop courses around contemporary issues.
- d) Target financial aid to support under-represented students to pursue LA disciplines, not just STEM and professional fields.
- e) Ensure that promotion and tenure policies reflect an investment in LA disciplines, faculty renewal, and curriculum development and planning, and provide more opportunities for junior faculty.
- f) Create incentives to encourage faculty in LA disciplines to focus on student learning rather than research prestige.
- g) Fight for increased state and federal funding support, which will reduce the burden on students enabling them to be more exploratory in their educational endeavors.
- h) Leverage alumni, board and legislative support.
- i) Build advising capacity to better assist students in connecting interest areas to LA majors to career.
- j) Broadly and effectively communicate the findings of research that demonstrates the long-range return on investment of LA majors.
- k) Do a better job articulating the broad value of the liberal arts and how they are core to

the mission of IHEs.

- 3) For each of the policy options identified in Question #2, please indicate your perception of the relationship between the cost and impact [repeat a-k above]. Please feel free to expand on any of your responses in the space provided below.

(high cost, high impact, high cost, low impact, low cost, high impact, low cost, low impact, not a good policy solution)

- 4) Please share any additional comments/questions.

Question Analysis

The Round Two survey consisted of three Likert-scale questions, #1, #2, #3, that were designed to capture a general sense of how the panelists felt about the causes of decreasing enrollments in liberal arts programs and courses, possible policy options for responding to those decreases, and the cost and impact ratio for each of the options in question #2. The questions and responses are illustrated in Table 6, Table 7, and Table 8 below.

Question 1

This question was designed to generate a deeper understanding of the causes of the policy problem defined in this study— that of decreasing enrollments in liberal arts program and courses. The question read: “[p]lease indicate to what extent you believe each of the following items impact demand and enrollment in liberal arts programs and courses. Please feel free to expand on any of your responses in the space provided below.” Table 6 below provides a summary of the key statistical findings regarding how panelists perceived forces impacting demand and enrollments for liberal arts programs and courses.

Table 6. Forces that Impact Demand and Enrollment in Liberal Arts Programs and Courses

Question	Number of responses in each category			
	To a great extent	To some extent	To no extent	N/A
1) Please indicate to what extent you believe each of the following items impact demand and enrollment in liberal arts programs and courses. Please feel free to expand on any of your responses in the space provided below.				
a) Aftershock of 2008 recession and wage stagnation causing students to focus more on employment outcomes of higher education.	16	14	0	0
b) Influence of business and industry on higher education decision-making.	14	11	5	0
c) Growing materialism and perception of the purpose of HE as workforce preparation.	19	9	1	1
d) Political and media rhetoric that liberal arts are “esoteric, elitist, and unnecessary.”	13	14	2	1
e) Political and media rhetoric that liberal arts majors do not lead to high-paying jobs (following graduation).	19	9	1	0
f) HE leaders are not effectively conveying the value of liberal arts in relation to both civic and career preparation.	10	28	2	0
g) HE leaders are not effectively leveraging the body of research linking LA majors to positive career outcomes.	12	14	3	0
h) Reluctance of LA departments to rethink, redesign and innovate their programs to increase relevance and student appeal.	11	16	3	0
i) Faculty focus too heavily on research interests rather than ensuring “robust student learning experiences or outcomes.”	7	16	7	0
j) Increasingly diverse student body challenging traditional LA curriculum, viewpoints, and relevance to them.	6	18	5	0

k) Decreased public support for HE causing student debt burdens to increase creating urgency to link majors to immediate employment.	18	9	2	0
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Additional comments from the panel included:

“I think the lack of commitment to improving pedagogy and instructional student engagement has lead [sic] to the perception that not enough is being done in LA to challenge and bring student needs in focus.”

“There has been a significant escalation of costs of higher education, increasing much faster than the rate of inflation. This naturally has parents and students concerned about how they will afford the investment in HE and pay off student loans.”

“The main problem, in my view, is the perception of students, potential students, and parents that LA studies do not lead to high paying jobs. This is not true, but it is widely believed to be true.”

“It is incumbent on higher education leaders to articulate the value and usefulness (yes, practical outcomes) of a liberal arts focus to skeptical stakeholders (regents and legislators for example). The evidence is there that liberal arts majors have strong career trajectories. The perceptions of the liberal arts as impractical are not in alignment with the data. At the same time, faculty and deans must embrace innovation and change in the liberal arts curriculum, and cannot rest on an old paradigms or old lines of defense.”

The majority of the panel indicated that all 11 items identified in question #1 impacted demand and enrollment in liberal arts programs and courses “to a great extent” or “to some extent.” The three items with the greatest impact were an increased culture of materialism and belief that higher education serves primarily as preparation for workforce; negative political and media rhetoric misleading the public to believe that liberal arts programs will not lead to gainful

employment; and declining state support placing a greater share of the cost of higher education on the students and their families. Each of these items links back to the following themes from the Round One survey summary: Theme I: Shifting Perception of the Purpose of Higher Education, Theme II: Financial Issues, and Theme III: Media and Political Rhetoric. The responses to this question helped inform which of the themes derived from the responses to the Round One survey were the most pressing for the panelists. These findings helped craft the final policy solutions presented back to the panel in the Round Three survey.

Question 2

This question was designed to gain a better understanding of panelist perceptions regarding how desirable and important each policy option was. The question read: “[t]he following policy options were shared by panelists as ways in which campus leadership can address the decreasing demand and enrollments in liberal arts programs/courses. Please indicate to what extent you believe each item is desirable and important, regardless of cost. Please feel free to expand on your responses in the space provided below.” A summary of panelist responses for each policy option are in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Round Two Survey Policy Options, Ranked by Desirability and Importance

Question	Number of responses in each category			
	Very desirable and very important	Somewhat desirable and somewhat important	Not desirable or important	N/A
2) The following policy options were shared by panelists as ways in which campus leadership can address the decreasing demand and enrollments in liberal arts programs/courses. Please indicate to what extent you believe each item is desirable and important, regardless of cost. Please feel free to expand on any of your responses in the space provided below.				

a) Provide support to fund and facilitate innovative redesign of LA programs to link them to professional programs.	14	13	2	0
b) Create coherent, transdisciplinary thematic pathways based around specific learning themes linking upper-division general education coursework to be relevant to civic and professional preparation.	18	10	0	0
c) Revitalize traditional LA courses to be more relevant to diverse student populations and develop courses around contemporary issues.	20	9	0	0
d) Target financial aid to support under-represented students to pursue LA disciplines, not just STEM and professional fields.	15	13	1	1
e) Ensure that promotion and tenure policies reflect an investment in LA disciplines, faculty renewal, and curriculum development and planning, and provide more opportunities for junior faculty.	10	16	3	0
f) Create incentives to encourage faculty in LA disciplines to focus on student learning rather than research prestige.	13	13	2	1
g) Fight for increased state and federal funding support, which will reduce the burden on students enabling them to be more exploratory in their educational endeavors.	17	9	3	0
h) Leverage alumni, board and legislative support.	14	12	2	0
i) Build advising capacity to better assist students in connecting interest areas to LA majors to career.	19	10	0	0
j) Broadly and effectively communicate the findings of research that demonstrates the long range return on investment of LA majors.	19	10	0	0
k) Do a better job articulating the broad value of the liberal arts and how they are core to the mission of IHEs.	22	5	2	0

The desired outcome of this question was to determine which of the policy options that were derived from the Round One survey were preferred by the majority of the panel. The majority of panelists identified all 11 policy options as either very desirable and important or

somewhat desirable and important. The prominent themes were more effective communication regarding the value of liberal arts education, revitalization of the liberal arts curriculum and pathways, and more robust liberal arts to career advising. The additional comments for this question were limited, but one panelist noted that research prestige and a focus on student learning do not need to be “an either-or scenario.” Another panelist commented that traditional courses should be offered alongside innovative courses. These themes and comments were used to inform the policy options presented in the Round Three survey.

Question 3

Question #3 was designed to determine the cost-impact ratio for each of the policy options presented in the Round Two survey. The question read as follows: “[f]or each of the policy options identified in Question #2, please indicate your perception of the relationship between cost and impact. Please feel free to expand on any of your responses in the space provided below.” A summary of panelist responses for each policy option are in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Round Two Survey Policy Options, Ranked by Cost and Impact

Question	Number of responses in each category				
	High cost, high impact	High cost, low impact	Low cost, high impact	Low cost, low impact	Not a good policy solution
3) For each of the policy options identified in question #2, please indicate your perception of the relationship between cost and impact. Please feel free to expand on any of your responses in the space provided below.					
a) Provide support to fund and facilitate innovative redesign of LA programs to link them to professional programs.	13	14	10	2	0

b) Create coherent, transdisciplinary thematic pathways based around specific learning themes linking upper-division general education coursework to be relevant to civic and professional preparation.	7	2	15	5	0
c) Revitalize traditional LA courses to be more relevant to diverse student populations and develop courses around contemporary issues.	4	3	17	3	0
d) Target financial aid to support under-represented students to pursue LA disciplines, not just STEM and professional fields.	14	9	2	0	3
e) Ensure that promotion and tenure policies reflect an investment in LA disciplines, faculty renewal, and curriculum development and planning, and provide more opportunities for junior faculty.	2	2	16	7	2
f) Create incentives to encourage faculty in LA disciplines to focus on student learning rather than research prestige.	3	4	13	4	5
g) Fight for increased state and federal funding support, which will reduce the burden on students enabling them to be more exploratory in their educational endeavors.	14	1	10	2	2
h) Leverage alumni, board and legislative support.	2	3	14	8	1
i) Build advising capacity to better assist students in connecting interest areas to LA majors to career.	15	3	9	1	1
j) Broadly and effectively communicate the findings of research that demonstrates the long range return on investment of LA majors.	3	0	19	6	0
k) Do a better job articulating the broad value of the liberal arts and how they are core to the mission of IHEs.	2	0	20	6	1

This question was premised on the understanding that higher education leaders and decision-makers function within a highly fiscally constrained environment where each policy decision involves a tradeoff that involves withholding resources from another priority area. The

policy options selected for Round Three were all identified by the majority of the panelists as high-impact. Additional comments from the panel provided a critique of the question itself:

“This section was very challenging from me to answer. Many of these remedies involve changing cultural perception. That can be done expensively and quickly, e.g. with TV ads and billboards, or the way we more typically operate in higher ed: authentic, labor intensive, cheap, and slow. It’s also hard to guess which of these approaches might be effective. So for nearly all of these I was uncertain about both the cost axis and the impact axis.”

“I am having trouble judging ‘cost’—for example, the first two strategies could benefit from the influx of major dollars, but could also be accomplished with provost leadership and modest dollars; the last two could be major communications campaigns or simply the diligence of leaders to communicate the message.”

“Cost here interpreted as direct dollars. Did not consider current staff time as a cost.”

So, although the statistical findings from this question were meaningful, the comments in the open-ended section highlighted an issue with the format of the question. The responses to question #3 helped inform the creation of the Round Three survey by identifying high-impact programming, how the “cost” side of the ratio was less informative than had been anticipated for this purpose.

Round Three Survey Administration and Analysis

The invitation to complete the Round Three survey was sent to the 30 panelists that responded to the Round Two survey via an email containing an embedded link to the online survey. As with Round One, the participants were required to enter their email address before beginning the survey which they were able to save and return to at any time. A reminder email was sent at the end of the one-week administration window. As with Round One and Round

Two, the majority of the panelists responded within the window, though a few people asked for (and were granted) extensions. The survey was ultimately completed by 21 of the 30 panelists who completed Round Two.

The Round Three survey was based on the panelist responses to the Round Two survey. The majority of the Round Two survey results were quantitative. The policy options provided in #2 and #3 of the Round Two survey were ranked by the panelists based on desirability and impact. Of the 11 options in the Round Two survey, one was removed as a result of low rankings in both categories, and the remaining 10 were condensed into six policy recommendations for the Round Three survey. Following are the questions panelists were asked in the Round Three survey (see Appendix I for Round Three survey questions as they appeared in SurveyShare).

- 1) Please review and rank the policy recommendations below (top 3). Each option is intended to be implemented and supported by campus leadership. You will be asked to explain your rankings later in the survey.

(first choice; second choice; third choice; not in top three)

- a) Provide financial and training support to faculty/departments to: encourage the revitalization of traditional LA courses to make them more relevant to diverse student populations; develop courses around contemporary issues utilizing new pedagogies and technologies; and create coherent, transdisciplinary thematic pathways based around specific learning themes making upper-division general education coursework relevant to both civic and professional preparation.
- b) Build advising capacity to better assist students in connecting their interest areas to LA majors to career.

- c) Revise promotion and tenure policies to reflect an investment in LA disciplines, faculty renewal, and curriculum development and planning, and provide more opportunities for junior faculty. Create incentives to encourage faculty in LA disciplines to reinvigorate the focus on student learning.
 - d) Launch a concerted campaign to leverage alumni, board and legislative support to lobby for increased state and federal funding support, and reduce the financial burden on students and their families.
 - e) Reform financial aid practices to provide targeted support for underrepresented students to pursue LA disciplines, not just STEM and professional fields.
 - f) Mount an extensive PR campaign to broadly and effectively communicate (to the public, press, politicians, and other stakeholders), the research findings that demonstrate the positive outcomes of LA education including but not limited to: the civic, fiscal and cultural benefits to society; the employer/workforce preference for the characteristics and skills of students who have received a liberal education; and the career/advanced degree outcomes and job satisfaction levels of LA majors in relation to non-LA majors.
- 2) What reasons led you to select your first choice? What are the possible and desirable outcomes of this policy option?
 - 3) Please identify the pros, cons, and trade-offs of the policy options you selected as your first choice.
 - 4) What reasons led you to select your second choice? What are the possible and desirable outcomes of this policy option?

- 5) Please identify the pros, cons, and trade-offs of the policy option you selected as your second choice.
- 6) What reasons led you to select your third choice? What are the possible and desirable outcomes of this policy option?
- 7) Please identify the pros, cons, and trade-offs of the policy option you selected as your third choice.
- 8) For each of the policy recommendations below [repeat a-f above], please indicate the level of urgency for implementation, keeping in mind the challenges and constraints (financial, structural, political, etc.) faced by campus leaders.

(implement immediately; implement within 2 years; implement within 5 years; not a preferable policy option)

Question Analysis

Questions #1 and #8 used a Likert-scale to assess the panelist ranking of their preferred policy options (1st, 2nd, and 3rd choice) and the urgency for implementation of each option.

- 1) “Please review and rank the policy recommendations below (top 3). Each option is intended to be implemented and supported by campus leadership. You will be asked to explain your rankings later in the survey.”

(first choice; second choice; third choice; not in top three)
- 8) “For each of the policy recommendations below, please indicate the level of urgency for implementation, keeping in mind the challenges and constraints (financial, structural, political, etc.) faced by campus leaders.”

(implement immediately; implement within 2 years; implement within 5 years; not a preferable policy option)

Table 9 below details the statistical response to question #1.

Table 9. Round Three Survey Policy Options, Ranked by Preferability

Question	Number of responses in each category			
	First choice	Second choice	Third choice	Not in top three
1) Please review and rank the policy recommendations below (top 3). Each option is intended to be implemented and supported by campus leadership. You will be asked to explain your rankings later in the survey.				
a) Provide financial and training support to faculty/departments to: encourage the revitalization of traditional LA courses to make them more relevant to diverse student populations; develop courses around contemporary issues utilizing new pedagogies and technologies; and create coherent, transdisciplinary thematic pathways based around specific learning themes making upper-division general education coursework relevant to both civic and professional preparation.	12	4	1	4
b) Build advising capacity to better assist students in connecting their interest areas to LA majors to career.	1	3	5	10
c) Revise promotion and tenure policies to reflect an investment in LA disciplines, faculty renewal, and curriculum development and planning, and provide more opportunities for junior faculty. Create incentives to encourage faculty in LA disciplines to reinvigorate the focus on student learning.	2	2	3	10
d) Launch a concerted campaign to leverage alumni, board and legislative support to lobby for increased state and federal funding support, and reduce the financial burden on students and their families.	4	1	3	10
e) Reform financial aid practices to provide targeted support for underrepresented students to pursue LA disciplines, not just STEM and professional fields.	0	4	2	10

f) Mount an extensive PR campaign to broadly and effectively communicate (to the public, press, politicians, and other stakeholders), the research findings that demonstrate the positive outcomes of LA education including but not limited to: the civic, fiscal and cultural benefits to society; the employer/workforce preference for the characteristics and skills of students who have received a liberal education; and the career/advanced degree outcomes and job satisfaction levels of LA majors in relation to non-LA majors.

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The responses to question #1 and were analyzed to ascertain the preferability of each policy option. Panelists were allowed to select their top three preferred policy options. Since the panelists are also the intended end-users of the summary brief, a decision rule was applied to the analysis of the Round Three survey to omit any policy option that was not in the top three selections of the majority of the panel. Only two policy options were selected in the top three policy choices by the majority of the panel, Option A and Option F. The remaining four policy options were preferred by less than half of the panel, and were thus removed from consideration for the culminating brief. A summary of those four options is below, followed by the two policy options that were included in the summary brief.

The responses to question #8 were analyzed to gain a sense of the level of urgency for all six policy options, which is presented in Table 10 below.

Table 10. Round Three Survey Policy Options, Ranked by Urgency

Question	Number of responses in each category			
	Implement Immediately	Implement w/in 3 Years	Implement w/in 5 Years	Not a Preferable Policy Option
8) For each of the policy recommendations below, please indicate the level of urgency for implementation, keeping in mind the challenges and constraints (financial, structural, political, etc.) faced by campus leaders.				

a) Provide financial and training support to faculty/departments to: encourage the revitalization of traditional LA courses to make them more relevant to diverse student populations; develop courses around contemporary issues utilizing new pedagogies and technologies; and create coherent, transdisciplinary thematic pathways based around specific learning themes making upper-division general education coursework relevant to both civic and professional preparation.	12	6	1	2
b) Build advising capacity to better assist students in connecting their interest areas to LA majors to career.	9	8	3	0
c) Revise promotion and tenure policies to reflect an investment in LA disciplines, faculty renewal, and curriculum development and planning, and provide more opportunities for junior faculty. Create incentives to encourage faculty in LA disciplines to reinvigorate the focus on student learning.	4	9	3	5
d) Launch a concerted campaign to leverage alumni, board and legislative support to lobby for increased state and federal funding support, and reduce the financial burden on students and their families.	8	6	3	3
e) Reform financial aid practices to provide targeted support for underrepresented students to pursue LA disciplines, not just STEM and professional fields.	5	9	1	4
f) Mount an extensive PR campaign to broadly and effectively communicate (to the public, press, politicians, and other stakeholders), the research findings that demonstrate the positive outcomes of LA education including but not limited to: the civic, fiscal and cultural benefits to society; the employer/workforce preference for the characteristics and skills of students who have received a liberal education; and the career/advanced degree outcomes and job satisfaction levels of LA majors in relation to non-LA majors.	10	5	2	1

As is evidenced in Table 10, the four policy options that were not selected in the top three preferred policy options by the majority of the panel in question #1, Options B, C, D and E, did nonetheless receive high marks in terms of urgency of implementation. This may be attributed to

one of two issues. The first is that questions #1 and #8 were crafted in such a way that the former only allowed the panel to select three preferred options, but the latter asked the panel to address the urgency of all six policy options. It may have been advisable to either allow the panel to rank all six policy options in terms of preferability (rather than limiting them to only three choices) in question #1, or to have limited the responses in question #8 to only the panelists' top three policy selections from question #1. Either of these approaches would have ensured greater consistency between questions and comparability of responses. The second issue is that question #1 does not clearly articulate the criteria for preferability, particularly in terms of feasibility. When the question was designed, it was assumed that feasibility would be one of the implicit considerations taken into account by the panel during their selection process. However, since this was not explicitly stated in the question itself, it may have left room for the panelists to interpret the question differently from one another. If these two issues had been addressed prior to administration of the Round Three survey, the analysis may have led to the selection of a different or larger set of policy options.

Rejected Policy Options

The four policy options below were preferred by less than half of the panel and were subsequently removed from consideration for the policy brief. It is important to note that these four policy options were the product of three rounds of the policy Delphi survey. They represent some of the best thinking of a panel of expert leaders and practitioners, so they should by no means be disregarded as they remain relevant possible policy solutions to the liberal arts crisis that may be appropriate for some institutions.

- 1) Build advising capacity to better assist students in connecting their interest areas to LA majors to careers.

Although this policy option was only selected by one panelist as their first option, they did feel strongly that it should be a priority for campus leaders, “[a]dvising is an area that directly affects the students and will support them in a way that all the educational and PR campaigns in the work could never do.” It should also be noted that although it was not a popular policy option among the panelists—only nine selected it to be in their top three—when it came to the question of urgency, nine panelists indicated that it should be implemented immediately, eight said it should be implemented within three years, three said it should be implemented within five years, and none indicated that it was not a preferable policy option. These findings demonstrate that all panelists who responded to the question believed it was worthy of implementation, but it did not make their list of top three policy options.

- 2) Revise promotion and tenure policies to reflect an investment in LA disciplines, faculty renewal, and curriculum development and planning, and provide more opportunities for junior faculty. Create incentives to encourage faculty in LA disciplines to focus on student learning.

This policy option was one of the least popular of the six options among the panelists. Only seven members of the panel placed it in their top three selections, and five stated outright that it was not a preferable policy option, which was the highest rejection rate of all six options. That said, four panelists stated that it should be implemented immediately, nine said it should be implemented within three years, and three said it should be implemented within five years. Support for this policy option was succinctly stated by one panelist as follows, “[i]t begins with the faculty, and is directed at real change, not just at outside advocacy and pricing strategies. It addresses the core issues that need to change if we are to revitalize the LA curriculum in meaningful ways that meet current student demands.” These findings demonstrate that although

this option ranked well below the other choices provided, many of the panelists still believed it should be implemented.

- 3) Launch a concerted campaign to leverage alumni, board and legislative support to lobby for increased state and federal funding support, and reduce the financial burden on students and their families.

This policy option was the first selection for four panelists, which is the highest number of first choice selections of the four rejected options. Many of the panelists who identified this option in their top three focused more on the financial burden aspect than they did on the campaign piece. This is demonstrated by one panelist who selected it as their first choice as follows, “[t]he increases in tuition over the past two decades and the indebtedting of an entire generation are unconscionable. We must change this issue if we are to have a good rapports [sic] and recruit and retain from our community.” However, only eight panelists indicated that it was in their top three policy options and three said it was not a preferable policy option. Nonetheless, eight panelists indicated that it should be implemented immediately, six said it should be implemented within six years, and three said it should be implemented within five years. As with the other rejected policy options, although it was not as preferred as the top two selections, 17 panelists still believed it was worthy of implementation.

- 4) Reform financial aid practices to provide targeted support for under-represented students to pursue LA disciplines, not just STEM and professional fields.

This policy option stands out as the only selection of the six possible options that no panelists ranked as their first choice, four said it was not a preferable policy option, and only six identified it in their top three, which makes it overall the least preferred policy option. However, one panelist comment eloquently captures why this is still an important policy option to be

considered, “[s]tudent debt is a huge problem in the US, impacting society from home ownership to career choice to starting families. Even students in STEM fields who choose to go to medical school graduate with debilitating debt. As a responsible society we ought to look at all options to reduce student debt including revisiting regulations on refinancing debt, examining institutions’ tuition increases, lobbying for increased federal grants and for state investments in public education. This is a multifaceted problem and will require a variety of approaches to reduce student debt.” Another panelist commented on the disproportionate impact the financial issue has on diverse student populations, “[s]tudents from less privileged backgrounds often face the most pressure to find a well-paying job immediately after graduation. More financial aid will give them more freedom to pursue LA majors.” This sentiment was echoed in the way panelists responded to the issue of urgency: five said it should be implemented immediately, nine said it should be implemented within three years, and one said it should be implemented within five years. These findings indicate that even the least popular of the six policy options is considered worthy of implementation by 15 members of the panel.

Preferred Policy Options

The two policy options below were preferred by over half the panel and were included in the culminating summary brief.

- 1) Provide financial and training support to faculty/departments to encourage the revitalization of traditional LA courses to make them more relevant to diverse student populations; develop courses around contemporary issues utilizing new pedagogies and technologies; and create coherent, transdisciplinary thematic pathways based around specific learning themes making upper-division general education coursework relevant to both civic and professional preparation.

This policy option was the clear favorite of the entire panel. 12 panelists selected it as their most preferred policy selection and only four did not rank it in their top three, although two panelists stated that it was not a preferable policy option. 12 panelists believed this work should be undertaken immediately, six suggested implementation within three years, and one within five years. The most powerful panelist comments regarding their selection of this option included:

“We need to connect the traditional liberal arts curriculum to the needs of today’s society. New designs, pedagogies, technologies can be infused to enliven course and program offerings that have remained stagnate [sic] for several years.”

“I think this option is the way to continue to transform from within. This allows the discipline to control their field of study and to update it according to 21st Century skills, knowledge, expectations, etc. in a way that is meaningful to them.”

“Faculty are ultimately at the center of any revitalization. They are the content experts and the boots on the ground in any effort. Their buy-in, advocacy and implementation are vital to any transformative change in this area. We know that skills developed within LA such as critical thinking, the ability to make an argument, communicate effectively and work in teams are desired by employers. The ability to make this connection to diverse student populations is critical. Training would allow faculty to intentionally make this connection.”

“This policy places the responsibility for revitalizing liberal arts courses and programs, appropriately, in the hands of the faculty; in order to succeed the effort would need to be led by key faculty who have the respect of their peers and who are passionate about the issue. Ideally, the message that the liberal arts are relevant to student career and life would permeate the campus culture. Get some engineering faculty on board!”

“The liberal arts are most likely to achieve their greatest contributions to students’ educations not through the major, but through the integration of the knowledge and skills learned in the liberal arts with professional programs. By extension, they will contribute if they help students apply the lessons of the liberal arts to the solution of complex social problems. It is application not pure knowledge that will be the most attractive to students and most beneficial to all concerned in the long run. Helping faculty from a broad array of disciplines incorporate the knowledge and skills inherent in the liberal arts has the potential of yielding learning outcomes that students and employers alike will value highly.”

As is clearly demonstrated in the passionate, thoughtful contemplation of the panelists quoted here, this policy option is rich and multi-faceted, and empowers the faculty to lead this transformative work of revitalization.

- 2) Mount an extensive PR campaign to broadly and effectively communicate (to the public, press, politicians, and other stakeholders), the research findings that demonstrate the positive outcomes of LA education including but not limited to: the civic, fiscal and cultural benefits to society; the employer/workforce preference for the characteristics and skills of students who have received a liberal education; and the career/advanced degree outcomes and job satisfaction levels of LA majors in relation to non-LA majors.

This policy option was selected by 15 panelists to be in their top three, the second-largest amount of the six possible selections. One panelist said it was not a preferable policy option. 10 indicated that it should be implemented immediately, five said to implement within three years, and two said within one year. Notable responses regarding this policy option include:

“Folks have not been taught that the long-term investment, even accruing some debt, sets students up to earn more and find increased satisfaction in work over the course of their lives. It is also important that they understand the positive future generational impact and payouts of investing in education today. Bottom line: we need a public campaign that teaches what the return on education is.”

“The main problem with all of this is a communications problem. Data are widely promulgated that suggest that liberal arts majors do not make money after they graduate. While this is true in the first couple of years, it is NOT true after about ten years out and there are many studies that support this. Policymakers and journalists are not aware of this, or do not choose to believe it. The best outcome will be to make them better informed.”

“The PR campaign is necessary to get the word out about the value of higher education. That means that we have to be ready to talk about the successes we have.”

“Public policy folks need to understand that LA education, like a more narrow STEM education, can be empowering for students and for the culture/economy they are entering. The broader LA education can lead to even more innovation, but this isn’t readily apparent to power brokers in government and policy.”

“In some respects, I feel that AAC&U through its LEAP Campaign, public opinion research and employer surveying has done this and they’ve done it well. At the same time, the case has still not been made across the country for higher education as a public good, nor for the role of liberal arts in fulfilling that public good and helping to complete the unfinished agenda of American democracy, equality and prosperity.”

“This policy brings the issue off the campus and out into the ‘real world’—and around the dining room table. Keeping the facts about the relevance of the liberal arts in the public eye is

important. It is always best if alumni and employers are the spokespersons—presidents and deans will be seen as self-serving. Ideally, the target audiences will include potential students and their parents, high school teachers and advisors, as well as those in a position to provide support: legislators, politicians, etc.”

One panelist commented further that if the first policy recommendation was successfully implemented, it would lead to more positive student stories to share through a targeted public relations campaign. As with the first recommendation, this policy option is complex and involves many moving parts and stakeholders. Nonetheless, the panel identified it as one of the most pressing policy solutions for higher education leaders today.

As is evidenced in the findings above, these two policy options garnered the most robust support from the majority of the panel, and were therefore selected to become recommendations in the culminating summary brief that was shared back with the panel. Chapter V contains a deeper treatment of each of the preferred policy options and discusses the efficacy of the summary brief.

Summary

The purpose of this policy Delphi study was to harness expert thinking and experience to generate a set of actionable policy recommendations for higher education leaders to consider as they address the significant policy problem of how to manage decreasing enrollments in liberal arts courses and programs, which would be presented in the form of a culminating summary brief (Appendix J). To achieve this goal, the panel was guided through the three survey rounds over a two-month process of exploration and deliberation. The Round One survey began an open-ended discussion where panelists identified key issues in higher education currently threatening liberal arts education as well as an array of possible remedies to those threats. In Round Two, panelists

had an opportunity to provide an assessment of the severity of those threats, as well as the costs and desirability of a set of policy options designed to address them. Round Three put forth a final set of refined policy options for the panel to rank, while also identifying the benefits, strengths, weaknesses and possible trade-offs for each of their top three selections. This logical progression was designed to capture the best thinking of a panel of leading experts and practitioners at minimal cost, time-investment, and mitigating the negative effects of face-to-face group interaction on decision-making.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

This policy Delphi study took a chance. It was founded on a methodological framework which is no longer frequently used in education policy circles, but my advisor, Dr. David Ericson, and I were determined to assess whether it could be a useful tool for supporting important policy decision-making in higher education today. This dissertation, as described in the two research questions that framed the study, engaged dual research foci as both a policy study that seeks to inform a pressing policy problem facing higher education leaders, and a study of the effectiveness of the policy Delphi method. With humble gratitude for the expert panelists who committed their time and mental energies to help this study reach fruition, I believe I can confidently assert that this study has successfully addressed both research questions.

Research question #1 asked, “Given that higher education leaders have a responsibility to preserve liberal arts education at their institutions, what policy options would best enable them to optimally respond to the myriad internal and external threats to the liberal arts disciplines?” The findings from the policy Delphi were informative and significant. The majority of panelists agreed that “liberal arts programs are an indispensable part of the undergraduate curricular array at public, private baccalaureate, master’s and doctoral institutions.” Through the process of this iterative policy Delphi study, the panel identified a variety of internal and external threats impacting liberal arts program enrollments and developed a series of policy solutions to mitigate those threats. Over the course of the three surveys, the best thinking of the panel evolved into a set of six robust policy options for higher education leaders to consider when addressing the threat to liberal arts education, of which the panel collectively identified two preferred options which were included in the culminating policy brief below.

Culminating Policy Recommendations

The purpose of the Round Three qualitative questions #2-#7 was to gain a deeper understanding of why the panelists selected their preferred policy options and what they considered to be their strengths, weaknesses and possible trade-offs. Following is a detailed treatment of the two policy options that were preferred by over 50% of the panelists, and a summary of responses gathered from questions #2-#7 in relation to each option.

Recommendation #1: Liberal Arts Course and Program Revitalization

The policy option that received the greatest preference of the six options was: “Provide financial and training support to faculty/departments to encourage the revitalization of traditional LA courses to make them more relevant to diverse student populations; develop courses around contemporary issues utilizing new pedagogies and technologies; and create coherent, transdisciplinary thematic pathways based around specific learning themes making upper-division general education coursework relevant to both civic and professional preparation.” Of the 21 panelists who completed the Round Three survey, 17 placed it in their top three and 12 selected it as their first choice. 12 of the panelists indicated that the recommendation should be implemented immediately, while an additional seven supported implementing within three to five years.

Only two panelists did not think this was a preferable policy option.

Overview

This policy option would provide resources to support the development, implementation and evaluation of revitalized liberal arts programs with clearer pathways from enrollment to career. Control of the curriculum would remain in the hands of the faculty, who would be empowered with resources and support from campus administration to reinvigorate their

programs through collaborations with faculty across campus. This approach would support and help grow new and existing transdisciplinary programs that link the knowledge and skills of the liberal arts to workforce and professional preparation. This greater integration of programs across campus, in tandem with enhanced program to career advising and pedagogical growth and improvement, would enable liberal arts disciplines to reclaim their well-deserved value and legitimacy through clear demonstration of their 21st century relevance.

Benefits

These improved programs and delivery models would be more appealing to students and their families and ultimately lead to increased enrollments. As a result, increased resources would be directed toward the liberal arts colleges that would enable the preservation of existing liberal arts programs and courses as they grow alongside the new, transdisciplinary courses and programs. These new and revitalized programs would be more inclusive and equitable and utilize high-impact teaching, learning and co-curricular environments. This would help programs recruit and retain students and faculty from diverse backgrounds as their needs and demands are met by the more relevant, responsive programmatic offerings.

Challenges and Limitations

- This policy option would be cost-intensive to implement. Funds for professional development, office and personnel resources, faculty stipends and buy-outs, rewards for successful programs, etc., would require significant and sustained campus investment.
- Increased enrollments will take time to assess as students benefitting from this structural and curricular innovation begin to graduate. It will require patience, commitment and sustained support by campus leadership.

- The faculty investment required to reinvigorate curriculum and update pedagogical approaches would be substantial. Many may resist based on the perception of administrative overreach or be offended by the implication that their current practices and curriculum require change/defense. Furthermore, some may perceive such discussions as a threat to their disciplines.
- Campus-level administration may not be nimble enough to support collaborative initiatives of the scale needed to make institutional change. Innovation can be stifled by bureaucracy and reliance on past data to support future programming. This initiative would require a bold pivot from the strategic decision-making models at many institutions.
- The greatest trade-off would be shifting limited resources away from other projects and priority areas to support this costly endeavor.

Recommendation #2: Public Relations Campaign

The policy option that received the second greatest preference of the six options was: “Mount an extensive PR campaign to broadly and effectively communicate (to the public, press, politicians, and other stakeholders), the research findings that demonstrate the positive outcomes of LA education including but not limited to: the civic, fiscal and cultural benefits to society; the employer/workforce preference for the characteristics and skills of students who have received a liberal education; and the career/advanced degree outcomes and job satisfaction levels of LA majors in relation to non-LA majors.” Of the 21 panelists who completed the Round Three survey, 15 placed it in their top three, and two identified it as their first choice. 10 panelists indicated that the recommendation should be implemented immediately, while an addition seven

supported implementing within three to five years. One panelist said it was not a preferable policy option.

Overview

Effectively communicating the value of higher education has been consistently problematic for campus leadership, particularly in relation to the liberal arts disciplines. This current era of increasing political polarization and anti-intellectualism has catalyzed increased skepticism and misinformation regarding the value of liberal arts. This has negatively shaped public attitudes toward higher education, which impacts program enrollments and damages campus morale. Higher education leaders must launch coordinated public relations campaigns to disseminate a powerful counter-narrative to these derisive attacks by summarizing key findings of literature demonstrating the efficacy of liberal arts education in preparing students for career and civic life; clearly communicating ways in which the liberal arts are relevant to 21st learners through examples and success stories; and reaffirming the value of American higher education as a public good (deserving of public support) that promotes democracy and equality through research, education, and community service.

Benefits

This campaign would lead to increased and more diverse enrollments in liberal arts programs as students and their families better understand the benefit of liberal arts education for career, life and community well-being. More importantly, they must see themselves as welcome and included. If the case for higher education as a public good can effectively be made with state and national policymakers, funding may be restored to more manageable levels enabling institutions to innovate programming and practices and provide better financial aid and services to students in need.

Challenges and Limitations

- May be an overly idealistic policy option given the current political environment where truth and evidence are undervalued and all educational sectors are consistently derided and under-resourced.
- Will be very costly to mount a successful multi-tiered public relations campaign that effectively targets diverse audiences.
- The greatest trade-off would be the significant investment in time from administrators and faculty that could otherwise be focused on research, teaching, and other priority areas.

As mentioned earlier, the two policy options above were incorporated into the culminating summary brief, which was attached to the final thank you email sent to the 21 panelists who completed all three survey rounds. The email also included an embedded link to a short experience survey (Appendix K), which was designed to ascertain how effective the panelists found the Delphi process, and whether they would use the recommendations in the culminating summary brief at their own institutions. Within two weeks, 13 of the 21 panelists completed the experience survey. The responses were informative and useful as an assessment tool for ascertaining the effectiveness of the policy Delphi as a decision-making tool.

Effectiveness of the Policy Delphi

Research question #2 asked: “[h]ow, and to what extent, did the policy Delphi method contribute to the generation of expert-level policy options for higher education leaders? What are the strengths and weaknesses to be considered when applying this method in future policy studies?” To answer this question, the following set of criteria was established at the outset of the study by which to assess the tool’s effectiveness:

- 1) Did the policy Delphi facilitate the production of a comprehensive list of policy recommendations that address the first research question, including the benefits, drawbacks and trade-offs of each policy option?
- 2) Do the end-users (higher education leaders and decision-makers) value this policy Delphi process as an effective method for channeling expert opinions?
- 3) Will the intended end-user of the outcomes of this study (the culminating policy brief) find the policy recommendations relevant, robust, and useful? Will they endeavor to implement any of the recommendations?

Regarding criterion #1, the evidence from all three survey rounds indicated success.

Through an analysis of the Round One survey responses, a total of 11 policy options were generated and shared back with the panel in the Round Two survey. These 11 policy options were varied and covered issues from general education and curricular redesign, to public relations, academic advising, and faculty tenure and promotion policies. These 11 policy options were refined further into a comprehensive set of six policy options presented in the Round Three survey. Panelists provided useful feedback regarding the benefits, drawbacks, and trade-offs of each of their top three policy options.

I relied heavily on the panelists' responses to the experience survey to address criteria #2 and #3. To address criterion # 2, question #2 of the experience survey asked, “[h]ow effective do you think the policy Delphi survey approach utilized in this study was as a tool for generating useful policy recommendations for higher education leaders and practitioners?” Seven panelists responded that it was very effective and six responded that it was somewhat effective. No panelists indicated that it was not at all effective. In the open-ended response section of this question, panelist responses were as follows:

“I think the results are quite credible, and gathering information this way is a lot easier (and less expensive) than flying all these folks around the country to talk it through. The outcome would probably have been about the same. Still unsure about the credibility of the findings with the usual skeptics who think unless they did it themselves that it’s not meaningful for their uniquely distinctive institutions.”

“As a survey method for a dissertation its [sic] in terms of cost, rapid response time needed—opportunity to collect info quickly, collection of data from sources from a broader geography.”

“It was good to have a set of responses that support and even go further than statement from national organizations.”

“It was a good way to gather information from a range of participants and the multi-round process allowed opinion is to be modified. It did not allow much discussion in depth [sic], but that is part of the nature of the methodology.”

“I liked the iterative approach A LOT. One improvement might be a little more pre-work before the survey period begins.”

“Very useful for ‘generating’ useful policy recommendations; probably less effective at evaluating each one. I think that each of us respond based on our individual experiences—which of course vary considerably.”

These responses collectively demonstrate that the policy Delphi method was perceived by the majority of the panelists who responded to the experience survey as an effective tool (per criterion #2), which was a most welcome finding. One individual commented that more pre-survey work would have improved the process. Although the panelist was not detailed in what was specifically meant by this comment, in general it is good advice to plan well and design

strategically, which I will take into consideration as I pursue future applications of the policy Delphi method.

To address evaluation criterion #3, question #3 of the experience survey asked, “[h]ow likely is it that you will use one or more of the recommendations produced by this policy Delphi panel at your own institution?” Of the 13 panelists who responded, four said it was very likely and five said it was somewhat likely. No panelists indicated that it was not likely at all. In the open-ended response section of this question, one high-level administrator who works at the system-level of a large state system responded, “I have already shared the summary with General Education coordinators.” Another panelist indicated that they are retired, “...but I am likely to use the information in my remaining consulting and speaking activities.” Still another stated, “[w]ell done. Will share the summary with my colleagues for our collective consideration.” All three of these responses support a positive assessment of the usefulness and usability of the findings from the policy Delphi hence the assessment of criteria #3 was also positive.

In addition to confirming positive responses to all three success criteria, the survey responses went even further. Several respondents expressed an interest in continuing the engagement from this policy Delphi study in interview sessions and through additional discussions with their peers. Additional responses included the following:

“A great study. I can’t wait to read the results.”

“I would love to have had a chance to discuss the recommendations!”

“The questions were well crafted and thought provoking.”

“I just felt that sometimes the questions were too big to grapple with in one session.”

The sentiment of the panelist who felt the questions were too big was echoed by other panelists in Rounds One and Two. This will be discussed further in the Lessons and Limitations section below.

Lessons and Limitations

One of the primary lessons learned from this three round study was that the Round One and Round Three surveys required too much time to complete, and that the amount of time estimated for completion (30 minutes) was not enough for some panelists. One panelist sent a friendly email before completing the Round One survey to say that after reviewing the questions, he had to remove himself from the study as it was more time-consuming than he had anticipated. A panelist who completed the first two survey rounds emailed in response to the invitation to complete the Round Three survey to express his regret that he did not have time to complete the Round Three survey given his heavy workload. Another panelist noted in one of the open comment sections of the Round One survey that the questions were taking much longer to consider and prepare a response to than she had expected. She said she wished she had more time to complete them, which leads to the second lesson learned from the Round One survey administration. The one-week survey administration window allowed for each of the survey rounds was not enough time for all the panelists. For all three survey rounds, at least one panelist requested an extension, while others simply responded to the survey late, or did not complete the survey at all. This delayed the data gathering and analysis of each survey round which created complications for the creation of the next survey round and the summary brief. In the end, I managed to adhere to the administration timelines provided to the panel at the outset of the survey, but the time constraints placed on the analysis and synthesis phases presented an unanticipated challenge.

Another issue identified was the question creation. One panelist commented that the questions were too similar to one another in the Round One survey. I also noted during my analysis that several other panelists responded to questions by either referring back to their response to a previous question or by repeating their response in more than one question. This leads me to conclude that the questions were either too similar, were not clearly worded, or were redundant with other questions in the survey. Other question issues arose in my analysis of the Round Two survey. Several panelists noted the question regarding the cost/impact ratio was unclear or did not provide enough clarity for what was meant by “costs.” This highlights an overarching issue with both the Round Two and Round Three surveys— the creation of each was based on the analysis of the previous survey round, but the questions were not pilot tested in the same fashion as Round One in the pilot phase. If the questions had undergone the same expert review (of practitioners, leaders and psychometrically-trained specialists), it may have mitigated some of the response issues that were evidenced in a handful of panelist responses.

Another issue was that several panelists mentioned they would have preferred more time to complete the questions or that the questions took longer to answer than they had expected. This is aligned with the comment from the panelist above that expressed a feeling that the questions were “too big” for a single session. In future administrations of the policy Delphi method, it will be important to consider the need to create clear, straight-forward questions that do not demand overly-complicated responses.

Another obvious limitation is that of panelist attrition over the course of the three survey rounds. Of the 33 panelists who responded to the Round One survey, only 21 completed the final survey round. As I mentioned earlier, my original goal was to have 10 panelists complete all three survey rounds, so this was a success in terms of my original research design however there

were methods I could have employed to reduce the attrition. The lessons mentioned above in relation to issues with the length and clarity of the survey questions are likely a contributing factor to at least some of the panelist attrition. Furthermore, the better than anticipated response rate may in part be attributed to the snowball sampling method utilized at the beginning of the study to identify panelists. As the majority of the panelists were identified through professional connections with myself and my dissertation committee, they may have completed all three survey rounds out of a sense of collegial obligation. This condition benefitted this particular study, but will not always be a reliable condition in future studies.

Implications and Recommendations

The Delphi method has been available for over a half-century, but technological advancements including universal access to and usage of email, and availability of online survey platforms and a variety of other web-based tools, has made it even more convenient and cost-effective for both the researcher and the panelists. My primary concern was that the panelists would not find the policy Delphi method convenient, useful, or effective. However, the quantitative results and comments from the experience survey, indicated that not only was the method effective, but the expert panelists believed that the results were useful and they would consider using them at their own institutions. Based on these findings, I would recommend that additional policy Delphi studies be coordinated at the national level to support important policy discussions among time-constrained higher education leaders.

Based on the criteria originally established at the outset of this study, this policy Delphi was a success, but there is certainly opportunity to continue the study by engaging in complementary research methods such as focus groups and interviews. The policy Delphi begins with broad concepts and refines them over the course of several iterative surveys. The result is a

clearer, more succinct understanding of the policy issues at hand and their possible and preferable remedies (policy options), including pros, cons and relative trade-offs. Utilizing additional research tools such as focus groups and interviews would allow the researcher to gain an even richer understanding of promising practices, pilot initiatives, and lessons learned. This data could inform the creation of an even more detailed policy briefing document supported by concrete examples to accompany each recommendation. This would make the policy recommendations even more compelling and might increase usability.

There are many options that should be explored regarding ways to incorporate the policy Delphi into current group communication practices. This study provides some evidence that it was effective and yielded practical, usable findings. Higher education leaders engage in a multitude of nationally-coordinated meetings and conferences throughout the year, many of which are designed to engage them collectively around emerging problems and pressing policy issues. These events are costly to attend, both in terms of time and money, and they cannot always support the kind of deep-dive into an issue that might be necessary to affect real policy change. The policy Delphi approach should be considered as a viable alternative to face-to-face meeting, or perhaps even as a complementary tool for engaging leaders and decisionmakers in a richer conversation around important policy matters that could be incorporated into other planning agendas as advanced preparation for future in-person discussions. Several panelists noted that they would like to continue this discussion with their peers and colleagues. This suggests that perhaps the policy Delphi would be a useful tool to help ascertain possible topics for future national conferences and meetings.

The two policy recommendations that were the culminating product of this policy Delphi study will require strong leadership and bold initiatives that are costly to implement and may

require significant cultural change within institutions in order to be successful and sustainable. Perhaps the easiest to implement is the recommendation to more effectively communicate the benefits of liberal arts education, and higher education in general, to the public, the media and the government. Nearly every university president has a communications team. These existing structures already have their public relations strategies in place. What they need is to be equipped with the right knowledge and data. By linking these teams with AAC&U and others conducting important research on the benefits of liberal education to our graduates and the value of higher education to society, the broken informational pipeline can begin to be repaired and a truly effective public relations campaign can begin to take root.

The recommendation to innovate liberal arts programs and courses could take years to get off the ground, but with good strategic planning and faculty engagement, it may be the key to saving liberal arts education. If the desired outcomes are realized, the results would be a radical re-visioning of liberal arts in American higher education that simultaneously transforms courses and programs into high-demand, interdisciplinary career pathways, while providing the resources to preserve the traditional disciplines and re-engage a new generation of students in the liberal arts. In the end, these reinvigorated programs will draw diverse students and faculty, becoming more inclusive of and responsive to our increasingly multicultural society.

Liberal arts education provides students with access to an extensive array of knowledge and skills essential to creating and maintaining a thriving democratic society. When the spirit of inquiry into a broad field of diverse knowledge systems and multicultural perspectives is diminished, so too departs the empathy and understanding that defines and distinguishes humanity. Now more than ever, we need to reengage the populace in critical inquiry and self-reflection. The policy recommendations produced by this expert panel can work in concert with

existing campus agendas to help move American higher education into a new era where it may finally act as the great equalizer that our country is so desperately in need of today.

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APPENDIX A:
IRB APPROVAL



**UNIVERSITY
of HAWAII***
SYSTEM

**Office of Research Compliance
Human Studies Program**

TO: Ericson, David, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Educational Foundations
Goodwin, April, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, University of Hawaii at Manoa

FROM: Rivera, Victoria, Dir, Ofc of Rsch Compliance, Social&Behav Exempt

PROTOCOL TITLE: Accreditation and the Future of Liberal Arts in Higher Education: A Policy Delphi Study

FUNDING SOURCE:

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2018-00873

Approval Date: November 20, 2018 Expiration Date: December 31, 2999

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

This letter is your record of the Human Studies Program approval of this study as exempt.

On November 20, 2018, the University of Hawaii (UH) Human Studies Program approved this study as exempt from federal regulations pertaining to the protection of human research participants. The authority for the exemption applicable to your study is documented in the Code of Federal Regulations at 45 CFR 46.101(b) 2.

Exempt studies are subject to the ethical principles articulated in The Belmont Report, found at the OHRP Website www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.html.

Exempt studies do not require regular continuing review by the Human Studies Program. However, if you propose to modify your study, you must receive approval from the Human Studies Program prior to implementing any changes. You can submit your proposed changes via email at uhrb@hawaii.edu. (The subject line should read: Exempt Study Modification.) The Human Studies Program may review the exempt status at that time and request an application for approval as non-exempt research.

In order to protect the confidentiality of research participants, we encourage you to destroy private information which can be linked to the identities of individuals as soon as it is reasonable to do so. Signed consent forms, as applicable to your study, should be maintained for at least the duration of your project.

This approval does not expire. However, please notify the Human Studies Program when your study is complete. Upon notification, we will close our files pertaining to your study.

If you have any questions relating to the protection of human research participants, please contact the Human Studies Program by phone at 956-5007 or

**1960 East-West Road
Biomedical Sciences Building B104
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96822
Telephone: (808) 956-5007
Fax: (808) 956-8683
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APPENDIX B:
PARTICIPANT INVITATION EMAIL

Aloha Dr. [NAME HERE],

My name is April Nozomi Goodwin. I am an Academic Affairs Program Officer at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM) with responsibilities that include academic program review, professional accreditation, articulation, academic contracts, and academic policy. I am also in the process of completing my PhD in Education Policy Studies here at UHM. My dissertation is focused on understanding and addressing the challenges facing the liberal arts in higher education in the United States. I am seeking higher education leaders, scholars, and practitioners to join a panel of experts to engage in a policy Delphi study. Your writing is an inspiration, which has guided my research, and I would humbly like to invite you to join this panel of experts. Your participation will be confidential and all data and findings will be completely anonymized.

The policy Delphi is a futures research methodology that allows the researcher to gather expert opinions regarding how policies or changes to policies impact programs and institutions. This structured communication technique is designed to capture diverse expert opinions on the strengths, weaknesses and trade-offs of various policy options. It is my goal to use this research to inform policy options for higher education leaders to help them productively respond to the challenges facing liberal arts education today.

Should you agree to participate, your time commitment will be as follows:

- Mid January 2019: Complete Round 1 Online Survey (30 minutes)
- Early February 2019: Complete Round 2 Online Survey (30 minutes)
- Late February 2019: Complete Round 3 Online Survey (30 minutes)
- In March, you will receive the final draft of a culminating policy brief for your review and comment along with a brief questionnaire regarding your experience with the survey process. Your response to both of these is optional.

All surveys will be conducted online and all communication will be conducted via email. Although you are free to cease participation at any time, it would be most beneficial to the study if you would complete all three rounds of the survey. Additional details for each survey round are below:

Round 1 Survey: This survey is designed to capture a general understanding of your opinions and beliefs in relation to the changing landscape for Liberal Arts in higher education (Liberal Arts here is used to broadly describe disciplines in the Arts, Humanities, and Social and Natural Sciences).

Round 2 Survey: All panelist responses to the Round 1 Survey will be summarized and formulated into a refined set of questions. You will receive the Round 2 Survey approximately two weeks after the closing date of the Round 1 Survey. You will be asked to respond to the Round 2 Survey within one week.

Round 3 Survey: The Round 2 Survey results will be synthesized into a set of distinct policy recommendations. You will be asked to rank/prioritize the top five policy recommendations and elaborate on the key elements including trade-offs, pros, cons, and possible outcomes of each

selection. You will receive the Round 3 Survey approximately two weeks after the closing date of the Round 2 Survey and will be asked to respond within one week.

Thank you for your consideration. Given the timeline provided above, it would be wonderful to know whether you can join this expert panel at your earliest convenience. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Mahalo nui loa,
April Nozomi Goodwin

APPENDIX C:
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Aloha,

Mahalo for agreeing to participate in this policy Delphi study. These surveys are part of my PhD dissertation research, which is focused on understanding and addressing the challenges facing the liberal arts in higher education in the United States. You are a member of an expert panel comprised of higher education leaders, scholars, and practitioners with expertise in the areas of educational leadership, administration, curriculum and policy. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary and you may stop at any time. If you choose to cease participation, there will be no penalty or loss to you.

This study will consist of a series of three surveys, each of which is designed to be completed in under 30 minutes. *The link to each survey will be sent to you via email the evening before the administration window for that round begins.* You are able to save and exit the survey at any time, but please be sure to complete each survey within the administration window provided.

The **Round 1** survey aims to capture a general understanding of your opinions and beliefs in relation to the changing landscape for the liberal arts in higher education. The term liberal arts is used here to broadly describe disciplines in the arts, humanities, and social and natural sciences.

Administration Window: Tuesday, January 15th- Tuesday, January 22nd

The **Round 2** survey will include a summary of panel responses to the Round 1 survey, as well as a set of refined questions for you to respond to.

Administration Window: Tuesday, February 5th- Tuesday, February 12th

The **Round 3** survey will be formatted as a set of policy recommendations synthesized from the panel responses to Round 2. You will be asked to rank the top policy recommendations and elaborate on key elements including trade-offs, pros, cons, and possible outcomes of each selection.

Administration Window: Tuesday, February 26th- Tuesday, March 5th

The Round 3 responses will be analyzed and used as the foundation for a culminating policy brief for higher education leaders and policymakers. The brief will be shared with all members of the panel along with an evaluation regarding your experiences with the study and the policy Delphi process.

Risk & Benefit:

I believe participating in this research project will pose little risk to you. You may become stressed or uncomfortable answering any of the survey questions. If you do become stressed or uncomfortable, you can skip the question or take a break. You can also stop taking the survey or you can withdraw from the project altogether. There will be no direct benefit to you for participating in this survey. The results of this project may provide higher education leaders with an array of useful policy options to navigate pressing policy issues regarding the liberal arts in higher education.

Confidentiality and Privacy:

The Round 1 survey will ask several broad demographic questions, but will not ask for personal information beyond your email address. Please do not include any personal information in your survey responses. All study data will be secured on my password protected computer. Only my University of Hawai'i advisor and I will have access to the information. Other agencies that have legal permission have the right to review research records. The University of Hawai'i Human Studies Program has the right to review research records for this study.

Future Research Studies:

Identifiers will be removed from your identifiable private information and after removal of identifiers, the data may be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies and we will not seek further approval from you for these future studies.

Questions:

If you have any questions about this study, please email me at agoodwin@hawaii.edu. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. David Ericson, at ericson@hawaii.edu. You may contact the UH Human Studies Program at 808.956.5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu to discuss problems, concerns and questions, obtain information, or offer input with an informed individual who is unaffiliated with this specific research protocol. Please visit <http://go.hawaii.edu/jRd> for more information on your rights as a research participant.

Consent and Survey Access:

A link to each survey will be sent to you the evening before the administration window opens. Going to the first page of the survey implies your consent to participate in this study.

Please print or save a copy of this page for your reference.

Mahalo Nui Loa,
April Nozomi

APPENDIX D:
SURVEY EMAILS

Round 1

Aloha,

Thank you for agreeing to participate as a panelist in this policy Delphi study on the Future of Liberal Arts in Higher Education. The survey you are about to complete is Round 1 of a set of 3 survey rounds. You are able to save and exit at any time, but ***please complete the survey no later than Tuesday, January 22nd***. The Round 1 survey is designed to capture a general understanding of your opinions and beliefs in relation to the changing landscape for the liberal arts in higher education. The term liberal arts is used here to broadly describe disciplines in the arts, humanities, and social and natural sciences.

To begin the Round 1 Survey, please click the link below. Going to the first page of the survey implies your consent to participate in this study.

[Enter Round 1 Survey Here.](#)

Mahalo for your engagement with this very important topic. Have a wonderful day!

April Nozomi

Round 2

Aloha,

Thank you for participating as a panelist in this policy Delphi study on the Future of Liberal Arts in Higher Education. Your responses to the Round 1 survey were thoughtful and rich in detail (summary attached). Several themes emerged at varying levels of frequency. The Round 2 survey is designed to capture your perspectives on the collective array of themes and ideas gathered during Round 1. Please note, some items from the Round 1 survey do not appear in this round, but may be utilized in the culminating policy brief following Round 3.

The link to the Round 3 survey will be sent to you via email on Tuesday, February 26th and will be closed on Tuesday, March 5th. This final survey will be formatted as a set of policy recommendations synthesized from the panel responses to Round 2. You will be asked to rank the top policy recommendations and elaborate on key elements including trade-offs, pros, cons, and possible outcomes of each selection.

To begin the Round 2 survey, please click on the link below.

[Enter Round 2 survey here.](#)

You are able to save and exit at any time, but ***please complete the Round 2 survey by Tuesday, February 12th.***

Mahalo for your participation!

April Nozomi

Round 3

Aloha,

Thank you for completing the first two survey rounds. In this final round, you will be asked to rank the policy recommendations created from the panel responses to the Round 2 survey, and elaborate on key elements including pros, cons, trade-offs and outcomes of each selection. To begin the Round 3 survey, please click on the link below:

[Round 3 Survey Link](#)

You are able to save and exit at any time, but please complete the survey by Tuesday, March 5th, if possible.

Mahalo for your continued participation!

April Nozomi

Thank You Email with Experience Survey

Aloha.

Thank you for participating as a panelist in this policy Delphi study on the Future of Liberal Arts in Higher Education and completing all three survey rounds. Attached is a summary of the culminating policy recommendations and key issues identified for each.

I admire your passion for this pressing issue, so clearly evidenced in your responses to the three survey rounds. I hope you find the results of this study useful. You were part of an incredibly impressive panel of leaders and expert practitioners, and I know how fortunate I have been to benefit from your time and thoughtful attention. Thank you for sharing your wisdom with me and your colleagues. This has been a wonderful learning experience and is a crucial component of my dissertation research. I hope to thank you in-person at a future conference or event. Mahalo for your participation, and I wish you all the best as another exciting academic year nears completion.

If you have a few minutes (no more, I promise!), please complete this [Experience Survey](#). It will help me assess the effectiveness of the policy Delphi approach.

Thank you again, and have a wonderful day!

April Nozomi

APPENDIX E:
PILOT SURVEY

[menu](#)[Create Survey](#)[My Surveys](#)[My Contacts](#)

Design My Survey

Design your survey below. You can add new questions by clicking 'Add Question Here', or update survey settings.

When you're ready to collect results, click [Collect Responses](#).

[Survey Logo & Design](#) [Rearrange Questions](#) [Preview](#) [Collect Responses](#)

PILOT: The Future of Liberal Arts in Higher Education

[Edit Survey Name](#)[+ Add Question Here](#)

[Edit Question](#) [Copy Question](#) [Delete Question](#) [Add Skip Logic](#)

★ 1) Do you believe liberal arts programs are an indispensable part of the undergraduate curricular array at public and private baccalaureate, master's and doctoral institutions?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Probably Yes
- ☐ Probably No
- ☐ Definitely No
- ☐ Unsure
- ☐ Other:

[+ Add a New Question Here](#) [📄 Make a New Page Here](#)

[✎ Edit Question](#) [📄 Copy Question](#) [✕ Delete Question](#) [⌛ Add Skip Logic](#)

★ 2) In your view, why are liberal arts program enrollments decreasing?

[+ Add a New Question Here](#) [📄 Make a New Page Here](#)

[✎ Edit Question](#) [📄 Copy Question](#) [✕ Delete Question](#) [⌛ Add Skip Logic](#)

★ 3) To what extent should curricular array be determined by student demand?

- ☐ To a great extent
- ☐ To a moderate extent
- ☐ To some extent
- ☐ To no extent
- ☐ No basis to judge/not sure

[+ Add a New Question Here](#) [📄 Make a New Page Here](#)

[✎ Edit Question](#) [📄 Copy Question](#) [✕ Delete Question](#) [⌛ Add Skip Logic](#)

★ 4) To what extent should curricular array be determined by course enrollment?

- ☐ To a great extent
- ☐ To a moderate extent

- ☐ To some extent
- ☐ To no extent
- ☐ No basis to judge/ not sure

[+ Add a New Question Here](#) [📄 Make a New Page Here](#)

[✎ Edit Question](#) [📄 Copy Question](#) [✕ Delete Question](#) [⌘ Add Skip Logic](#)

★ 5) How are higher education leaders responding to decreasing enrollment in liberal arts programs?

[+ Add a New Question Here](#) [📄 Make a New Page Here](#)

[✎ Edit Question](#) [📄 Copy Question](#) [✕ Delete Question](#) [⌘ Add Skip Logic](#)

★ 6) How *should* higher education leaders respond to decreasing enrollment in liberal arts programs?

[+ Add a New Question Here](#) [📄 Make a New Page Here](#)

 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

★ 7) Do you believe reduced public funding signals that higher education is no longer viewed as a public good?

- ☐ Very true of what I believe
- ☐ Somewhat true of what I believe
- ☐ Somewhat untrue of what I believe
- ☐ Very untrue of what I believe
- ☐ Unsure

 Add a New Question Here  Make a New Page Here

 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

★ 8) To what extent do regional accreditors play a role in preserving the liberal arts in higher education?

- ☐ To a great extent
- ☐ To a moderate extent
- ☐ To some extent
- ☐ To no extent
- ☐ No basis to judge/not sure

 Add a New Question Here  Make a New Page Here

 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

★ 9) Do other stakeholders have a role to play in preserving the liberal arts in higher education? If so, please specify.

 Add a New Question Here Make a New Page Here Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

★ 10) Should the preservation and promotion of liberal arts programs be a high priority for campus leaders? Please explain your answer.

 Add a New Question Here Make a New Page Here Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

★ 11) What tools might higher education leaders leverage to ensure that liberal arts programs are preserved? How might these tools be employed? Please be specific.

 Add a New Question Here Make a New Page Here

 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

★ 12) Please list your current position.

Select one...



Other:

 Add a New Question Here  Make a New Page Here

 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

13) Please list your previous positions in higher education.

 Add a New Question Here  Make a New Page Here

 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

★ 14) Please indicate your total years of experience working in higher education.

 Add a New Question Here  Make a New Page Here

 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

★ 15) Please list all colleges and universities you have attended and what degrees you were awarded.

 Add a New Question Here  Make a New Page Here

 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

16) Please indicate your gender.

- ☐ Female
☐ Male
☐ Prefer not to answer
☐ Prefer to self-describe

[+ Add a New Question Here](#) [📄 Make a New Page Here](#)

[✎ Edit Question](#) [📋 Copy Question](#) [✕ Delete Question](#) [⌘ Add Skip Logic](#)

17) Additional comments:

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APPENDIX F:
ROUND ONE SURVEY

[menu](#)[Create Survey](#)[My Surveys](#)[My Contacts](#)

Design My Survey

Design your survey below. You can add new questions by clicking 'Add Question Here', or update survey settings.

When you're ready to collect results, click [Collect Responses](#).

[Survey Logo & Design](#) [Rearrange Questions](#) [Preview](#) [Collect Responses](#)

Policy Delphi Survey (Round 1): The Future of Liberal Arts in Higher Education

[Edit Survey Name](#)

[+ Add Question Here](#)

[Edit Question](#) [Copy Question](#) [Delete Question](#) [Add Skip Logic](#)

★ 1) How has the higher education landscape for liberal arts programs changed over the last several decades? What causes would you attribute those changes to?

[+ Add a New Question Here](#) [📄 Make a New Page Here](#)

[✎ Edit Question](#) [📄 Copy Question](#) [✕ Delete Question](#) [⌛ Add Skip Logic](#)

★ 2) In what ways do the liberal arts add value to the undergraduate educational experience (regardless of major)?

[+ Add a New Question Here](#) [📄 Make a New Page Here](#)

[✎ Edit Question](#) [📄 Copy Question](#) [✕ Delete Question](#) [⌛ Add Skip Logic](#)

★ 3) In your view, why are liberal arts program enrollments decreasing?

[+ Add a New Question Here](#) [📄 Make a New Page Here](#)

 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

★ 4) How are higher education leaders responding to decreasing enrollments in liberal arts programs? How *should* they be responding?

 Add a New Question Here  Make a New Page Here

 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

★ 5) Do you believe liberal arts programs are an indispensable part of the undergraduate curricular array at public and private baccalaureate, master's and doctoral institutions? Please explain your answer.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Probably yes
- ☐ Probably no
- ☐ Definitely no
- ☐ Unsure
- ☐ Please explain.

 Add a New Question Here  Make a New Page Here

 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

★ 6) To what extent should curricular array be determined by course enrollment and student demand for majors/programs?

- ☐ To a great extent
- ☐ To a moderate extent
- ☐ To some extent
- ☐ To no extent
- ☐ No basis to judge/not sure

[+ Add a New Question Here](#) [📄 Make a New Page Here](#)

[✎ Edit Question](#) [📄 Copy Question](#) [✕ Delete Question](#) [⌘ Add Skip Logic](#)

★ 7) Should the preservation and promotion of liberal arts programs be a priority for campus leaders? Please explain your answer.

[+ Add a New Question Here](#) [📄 Make a New Page Here](#)

[✎ Edit Question](#) [📄 Copy Question](#) [✕ Delete Question](#) [⌘ Add Skip Logic](#)

★ 8) What external stakeholders (accreditors, politicians, think tanks, etc.) play a role in determining the future of liberal arts in higher education? In what ways?

[+ Add a New Question Here](#) [📄 Make a New Page Here](#)

[✎ Edit Question](#) [📄 Copy Question](#) [✕ Delete Question](#) [⌘ Add Skip Logic](#)

★ 9) What policy tools might higher education leaders leverage if they endeavor to ensure that liberal arts programs are preserved? How might these tools be employed? Please be specific.

➕ Add a New Question Here

📄 Make a New Page Here

 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

★ 10) Do you believe reduced public funding signals that higher education is no longer broadly viewed as a public good?

- ☐ Very true of what I believe
☐ Somewhat true of what I believe
☐ Somewhat untrue of what I believe
☐ Very untrue of what I believe
☐ Unsure

➕ Add a New Question Here

📄 Make a New Page Here

 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

★ 11) Please list your current position.

Select one... 

Other:

➕ Add a New Question Here

📄 Make a New Page Here

 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

★ 12) Please indicate your total years of experience working in higher education.

 Add a New Question Here  Make a New Page Here

 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

13) Please indicate your gender.

- ☐ Female
☐ Male
☐ Prefer not to answer
☐ Prefer to self-describe

 Add a New Question Here  Make a New Page Here

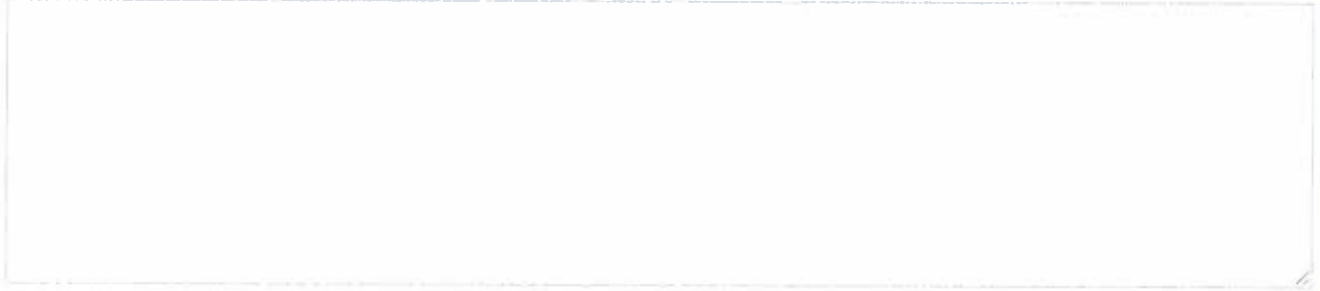
 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

14) Please indicate the racial and/or ethnic group(s) you identify with.

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
☐ Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
☐ White
☐ East Asian
☐ Southeast Asian
☐ South Asian
☐ Middle Eastern or North African
☐ Native Hawaiian
☐ Other Pacific Islander
☐ Black or African American
☐ Prefer not to answer
☐ Prefer to self-describe

 Add a New Question Here  Make a New Page Here

 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

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APPENDIX G:
ROUND ONE RESPONSE SUMMARY

Round 1 Survey Response Summary

PROBLEM

Demand for liberal arts courses/disciplines (not including math and science) is decreasing, which has led to reduced enrollments. Campus leaders are responding in a variety of ways, but an array of new/refreshed policy options designed to help institutions thrive in a constantly evolving social, political and economic context could help support decision-making and planning efforts.

Notes on Acronym use:

LA and liberal arts are used interchangeably

HE and higher education are used interchangeably

GE and General Education are used interchangeably

STEM is Science, Technology, Engineering and Math

I. Summary of Qualitative Items

Reasons for Reduced Demand/Enrollment in LA Programs and Courses

CHANGING HE ENVIRONMENT

- The purpose of higher education has shifted. Most students now go to college to get higher paying jobs, which was not historically the main priority of HE.
- Changing demographics- 1st generation students are less likely to select LA majors.
- “The sway of business and industry is strong.”
- Demand for and understanding of linkages between LA majors and career are down, in part because career advising is often in Student Affairs not Academic Affairs.
- Students and parents are seeking “skills and knowledge that are immediately workplace relevant.”
- Liberal arts have lost luster. Focus moved from “life of the mind” to career education.
- Increased focus on workforce outcomes has led to deemphasizing the LA skills that bolster grads to hold numerous, diverse jobs over the course of their lives.
- Decreased emphasis on LA and increased emphasis on personal financial returns and economic development.
- All HE has to prove its value, but this is especially true of LA programs.
- Increased focus on STEM (even though this includes liberal arts disciplines).
- Physical and biological sciences are not experiencing declines.
- Growing materialism and perception of HE’s main mission to prepare students for their first job.

- Fewer students majoring in disciplines that they perceive to lack a direct career path.
- High cost of undergraduate education triggering debt, causing students to be risk-averse in selecting majors.
- Social pressure to be practical rather than explore one's passion.
- Increased emphasis on STEM and "workforce" degrees in business, healthcare, and engineering.
- There has been less interest among students to major in LA so IHEs have to eliminate or consolidated majors in response.
- AP courses are counting toward DE requirement, so many students are less likely to take humanities/LA course, which may reduce the likelihood of then selecting as a major.
- Political backlash against LA, viewed as "esoteric, elitist and unnecessary, views exacerbated by the 2008 recessions and the country's divisive political context."
- STEM-related LA disciplines are not experiencing the same declines as the humanities and social sciences (excluding economics). These majors have been a "policy favorite" and continue to receive support.
- Students in STEM fields are lauded while LA students are not (as their disciplines are frequently publicly denigrated).
- "The HE landscape has changed to be more responsive to market demands and workforce development." This has led to urgency to enhance/increase professional fields and "hard skills."
- The primary reasons for shrinking in the numbers of LA majors is because the disciplines are not remaining relevant.
- Changing culture- 4-year degree is a "hoop to jump through" to get a higher-paying job.
- Don't do enough in middle and high school to foster an appreciation of the liberal arts.
- Young people don't know enough about life to understand that their passions will disappear in the face of real life.
- Failure to redesign the way LA programs teach students to meet student needs.
- The value of global communication and foreign languages are decreasing.
- Value is reduced to the monetary.
- Liberal arts are viewed as "service programs" at some institutions, faculty feel disrespected with high workloads, minimal funding.
- Declining state support and increasing student debt
- Too focused on major titles that will sound like a job, no emphasis on broad knowledge to prepare them to be workers and citizens.

FINANCIAL

- Wage stagnation has led to an increased focus on vocational education and the price of liberal arts education has risen.
- As state-funding shrinks and the student loan burden increases, parents are

- pressuring their children to pursue professional programs.
- Students are bearing an increasing share of the costs of higher education so are more concerned about immediate employment opportunities post-graduation.
- Parents counsel their children to pursue pathways to lucrative careers rather than pathways to happiness.
- Students are very focused on career outcomes of majors- the Great Recession is a major cause of this as students witnessed employment instability in family members.
- “[T]he humanities and the arts have been under policy siege since Reagan took office.” NEH funding is languishing while NSF flourishes.
- LA programs are being defunded and in many cases cut from the General Education Core.
- Consistent defunding of education by the state has sent a message to HE that burden is on the individual, no longer a public good.
- Most scholarship aid is offered to STEM disciplines.

MEDIA AND POLITICAL RHETORIC

- Legislators and other politicians have criticized the value of liberal arts degrees in terms of “practical outcomes.”
- Media and possibly public perceptions that LA is a waste of public funds, not worth students’ financial investment.
- National trend of “hysteria” pressuring students and families to view undergraduate education as pre-professional/vocational.
- Misleading data about correlation between majors and salaries/jobs.
- Political backlash against LA, viewed as “esoteric, elitist and unnecessary, views exacerbated by the 2008 recessions and the countries divisive political context.”
- IHEs branded as promoting “liberal agendas.”
- Negative narratives about the value of liberal arts education- media is adding to this narrative through negative portrayals in the media of student outcomes for these programs.
- Increasing political tension and divide leading to divisive rhetoric denigrating of LA and HE.
- Students are counseled to select STEM majors in order to find happiness since LA majors will not lead to a living wage.
- Current era of increasing political polarization and anti-intellectualism has contributed to skepticism and misinformation regarding the value of LA.

FACULTY ISSUES

- Faculty interests- focus on research interest rather than “robust student learning experience or outcomes.”
- “The cynicism generated by internal debates has permeated public discourse; when support for the liberal arts is seen as self-serving on the part of faculty, the public is more likely to doubt the intrinsic value of

these programs/courses.”

- Reluctance of LA departments to “rethink and redesign” curricula to increase relevance and student appeal.
- Over-production of PhDs and exploitation of part-time labor, universities produce surplus labor. “This system subsidizes the research professors who do not want to teach.”
- Problem- without mandatory retirement, tenured faculty continue to teach disciplines that have no or low enrollments.
- Graduate education is not aligned with trends in the curriculum. New faculty are not prepared to engage students around the value and power of the liberal arts.
- Faculty are too focused on prestige and the “intellectual heft” of their departments/disciplines- they are indifferent to college learning in their fields.
- Fewer new hires in the humanities leaving programs with “less dynamic” faculty.

GENERAL EDUCATION

- GE reform and curricular revision are perceived as a source of loss of courses for LA faculty.
- The discussion around GE has been problematic as departments fight over their share of the requirements when funding is tied to enrollments (faculty lines, department budgets).
- State universities are scaling back GE requirements (or offering waivers for professional programs), to lower LA course enrollments.
- The movement at many institutions to strengthen GE requirements is seeing the addition of world cultures and diversity studies to help make them more relevant.
- GE was once considered introductory courses “in the disciplines,” but some institutions are thematically linking upper-division GE coursework in ways that are relevant to both civic and professional preparation.
- Resistance to taking GE courses due to increased cost of tuition and “disaggregation of degrees.”

TECHNOLOGY

- K-12 curriculum is more focused on video and multi-media and less on the written word, which impacts the humanities greatly.
- The tech-driven economy has led students to seek tech education as they think it will be more practical.
- The increasingly diverse student body is challenging some more traditional points of view in the liberal arts.
- Computers and the internet are changing the way we read, think, access and store information. The massive proliferation of information and writing/publication is comparable to the way the printing press affected literacy rates.

Current Responses by HE Leaders

- HE leaders have taken public support for granted and have “been slow to mount campaigns putting forward positive, counter narratives”.
- There is a need to sell the value of LA degrees as delivering skills that will be marketable post-graduation. This is currently not effectively communicated.
- LA departments are being merged and eliminated, programs are being closed and funding and support is following the high-demand majors and programs.
- Institutions are not well-invested in “explaining the connections between interest areas and major.” Thus, the number of students selecting those majors is decreasing.
- Administrators are driving “top-down” initiatives to focus on workforce training that is being demanded by state legislators and boards.
- “Reluctance to embrace practical, career-oriented outcomes”
- Some leaders seem to think it is okay to contract LA program if student demand is decreasing. They should be seeing this as an opportunity to improve and update the curriculum.
- HE has done a poor job messaging that LA and professional education are not really at odds, but rather strengthen one another.
- There is a lack of coherent linkage/intersection between Gen Ed courses and student major (by academic advisors, counselors, administrators and commutation units.
- They are turning attention away from LA to the majors where demand is increasing, as they view students as consumers.
- HE admin are taking an “accounting” view of decreasing enrollments so are supporting elimination of programs. The business model is winning.
- They are encouraging better advertising of programs.
- They are “tinkering with” pricing and aid models.
- HE leaders are doing their best.
- Some are moving additional funds to LA and championing LA in public forums (alumni, regents, leg).
- HE leaders have increased communication conveying the value of LA programs in generating well-rounded employees, consulting with employers to match skills to workforce needs.

Policy Solutions for HE Leaders

- Promote faculty diversity, curricular currency, application to real-world contexts.
- Promote use of High Impact Practices.
- They should promote LA not be defending disciplines, but rather by encouraging the blending of LA and career fields and STEM.
- Reposition IHEs as “co-creators” with community to find solutions to public problems (helping create the public good).
- “When the liberal arts are ‘applied’ to significant questions, their value doesn’t need to ‘be defended’. It speaks powerfully for itself.”

- Provide faculty with time and resources to “redirect the curriculum” so that LA courses and majors are associated with professional programs.
- Make the argument that LA is a good in and of itself.
- Programs need to demonstrate relevance to contemporary student populations.
- They are cutting faculty, replacing full with part- time, eliminating programs.
- “They should change the content of programs to make them more workplace relevant- add technical writing to English programs, ethics to philosophy, business to the arts, etc.”
- They should stress the documented positive results of learning cross-cutting skills for career and life success.
- Argue for better funding at the federal level and less funding of things like military.
- Champion new initiatives and centers that place LA at the core of research, programming and education.
- Should increase department/discipline capacity to teach concept/context within disciplines.
- IHEs should be focused on reorganizing curricula and programs rather than letting demand influence resources.
- Link philosophy and business (ethics), Nursing and personal philosophy. Doesn’t change the field but will impact the job and how we teach future philosophy teachers.
- Innovate liberal arts programs to integrate human and technical/specific skills to prepare graduates to be nimble.

LITERATURE TO SUPPORT POSITIVE LA OUTCOMES

- Despite a “powerful body of research” linking outcomes gained by students in LA disciplines, the case is not widely made or understood outside of HE.
- The “drumbeat of complaint that the humanities and arts don’t lead to jobs” has been disproved time and again, recently by a study of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.
- AAC&U has done excellent work “naming the liberal arts earning associated with career preparation” yet enrollments have not yet responded.

II. Summary of Quantitative Items

- When asked whether they believe reduced public funding signals that higher education is no longer broadly viewed as a public good, 73% of the panel responded that this was either very true of what they believe or somewhat true of what they believe. The remaining 27% said it was somewhat untrue of what they believe or very untrue of what they believe.

- When asked to what extent should curricular array be determined by course enrollment and student demand for majors/programs, 60% of panel indicated “to some extent”, 33% said to a great or moderate extent, one person responded to no extent, and one had no basis to judge/not sure.
- When asked if they believed liberal arts programs are an indispensable part of the undergraduate curricular array at public and private baccalaureate, master’s and doctoral institutions, 79% of the panel said yes or probably yes. The remaining 21% responded positively but in short answer rather than selecting from the list of options. Those responses are incorporated into the summary of statements below.

APPENDIX H:
ROUND TWO SURVEY


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Policy Delphi Survey (Round 2): The Future of Liberal Arts in Higher Education

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1) Please indicate to what extent you believe each of the following items impact demand and enrollment in liberal arts programs and courses. Please feel free to expand on any of your responses in the space provided below.

to a great extent to some extent to no extent N/A

to a great extent to some extent to no extent N/A

Aftershock of 2008 recession and wage stagnation causing students to focus more on employment outcomes of higher education.

☐☐☐☐

Influence of business and industry on higher education decision-making.

☐☐☐☐

Growing materialism and perception of the purpose of HE as workforce preparation.

☐☐☐☐

Political and media rhetoric that liberal arts are "esoteric, elitist, and unnecessary."

☐☐☐☐

Political and media rhetoric that liberal arts majors do not lead to high-paying jobs (following graduation).

☐☐☐☐

HE leaders are not effectively conveying the value of liberal arts in relation to both civic and career preparation.

☐☐☐☐

HE leaders are not effectively leveraging the body of research linking LA majors to positive career outcomes.

☐☐☐☐

Reluctance of LA departments to rethink, redesign and innovate their programs to increase relevance and student appeal.

☐☐☐☐

Faculty focus too heavily on research interests rather than ensuring "robust student learning experiences or outcomes."

☐☐☐☐

Increasingly diverse student body challenging traditional LA curriculum, viewpoints, and relevance to them.

☐☐☐☐

Decreased public support for HE causing student debt burdens to increase creating urgency to link majors to immediate employment.

☐☐☐☐

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2) The following policy options were shared by panelists as ways in which campus leadership can address the decreasing demand and enrollments in liberal arts programs/courses. Please indicate to what extent you believe each item is desirable and important, regardless of cost. Please feel free to expand on any of your responses in the space provided below.

	very desirable and very important	somewhat desirable and somewhat important	not desirable or important	N/A
Provide support to fund and facilitate innovative redesign of LA programs to link them to professional programs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Create coherent, transdisciplinary thematic pathways based around specific learning themes linking upper-division general education coursework to be relevant to civic and professional preparation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Revitalize traditional LA courses to be more relevant to diverse student populations and develop courses around contemporary issues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Target financial aid to support under-represented students to pursue LA disciplines, not just STEM and professional fields.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ensure that promotion and tenure policies reflect an investment in LA disciplines, faculty renewal, and curriculum development and planning, and provide more opportunities for junior faculty.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Create incentives to encourage faculty in LA disciplines to focus on student learning rather than research prestige.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	very desirable and very important	somewhat desirable and somewhat important	not desirable or important	N/A
Fight for increased state and federal funding support, which will reduce the burden on students enabling them to be more exploratory in their educational endeavors.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leverage alumni, board and legislative support.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Build advising capacity to better assist students in connecting interest areas to LA majors to career.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Broadly and effectively communicate the findings of research that demonstrates the long range return on investment of LA majors.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do a better job articulating the broad value of the liberal arts and how they are core to the mission of IHEs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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3) For each of the policy options identified in Question #2, please indicate your perception of the relationship between cost and impact. Please feel free to expand on any of your responses in the space provided below.

	high cost, high impact	high cost, low impact	low cost, high impact	low cost, low impact	Not a good policy solution.
Provide support to fund and facilitate innovative redesign of LA programs to link them to professional programs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	high cost, high impact	high cost, low impact	low cost, high impact	low cost, low impact	Not a good policy solution.
Create coherent, transdisciplinary thematic pathways based around specific learning themes linking upper-division general education coursework to be relevant to civic and professional preparation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Revitalize traditional LA courses to be more relevant to diverse student populations and develop courses around contemporary issues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Target financial aid to support under-represented students to pursue LA disciplines, not just STEM and professional fields.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ensure that promotion and tenure policies reflect an investment in LA disciplines, faculty renewal, and curriculum development and planning, and provide more opportunities for junior faculty.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Create incentives to encourage faculty in LA disciplines to focus on student learning rather than research prestige.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fight for increased state and federal funding support, which will reduce the burden on students enabling them to be more exploratory in their educational endeavors.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leverage alumni, board and legislative support.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Build advising capacity to better assist students in connecting interest areas to LA majors to career.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Broadly and effectively communicate the findings of research that demonstrates the long range return on investment of LA majors.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do a better job articulating the broad value of the liberal arts and how they are core to the mission of IHEs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>


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4) Please share any additional comments/questions.

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APPENDIX I:
ROUND THREE SURVEY

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Policy Delphi Survey (Round 3): The Future of Liberal Arts in Higher Education

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1) Please review and rank the policy recommendations below (top 3). Each option is intended to be implemented and supported by campus leadership. You will be asked to explain your rankings later in the survey.

first	second	third	not in
choice	choice	choice	top
			three

first second third not in
choice choice choice top
three

Provide financial and training support to faculty/departments to: encourage the revitalization of traditional LA courses to make them more relevant to diverse student populations; develop courses around contemporary issues utilizing new pedagogies and technologies; and create coherent, transdisciplinary thematic pathways based around specific learning themes making upper-division general education coursework relevant to both civic and professional preparation.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Build advising capacity to better assist students in connecting their interest areas to LA majors to career.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Revise promotion and tenure policies to reflect an investment in LA disciplines, faculty renewal, and curriculum development and planning, and provide more opportunities for junior faculty. Create incentives to encourage faculty in LA disciplines to reinvigorate the focus on student learning.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Launch a concerted campaign to leverage alumni, board and legislative support to lobby for increased state and federal funding support, and reduce the financial burden on students and their families.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Reform financial aid practices to provide targeted support for under-represented students to pursue LA disciplines, not just STEM and professional fields.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Mount an extensive PR campaign to broadly and effectively communicate (to the public, press, politicians, and other stakeholders), the research findings that demonstrate the positive outcomes of LA education including but not limited to: the civic, fiscal and cultural benefits to society; the employer/workforce preference for the characteristics and skills of students who have received a liberal education; and the career/advanced degree outcomes and job satisfaction levels of LA majors in relation to non-LA majors.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

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2) What reasons led you to select your first choice? What are the possible and desirable outcomes of this policy option?

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3) Please identify the pros, cons, and trade-offs of the policy option you selected as your first choice.

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4) What reasons led you to select your second choice? What are the possible and desirable outcomes of this policy option?

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5) Please identify the pros, cons, and trade-offs of the policy option you selected as your second choice.

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6) What reasons led you to select your third choice? What are the possible and desirable outcomes of this policy option?

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7) Please identify the pros, cons, and trade-offs of the policy option you selected as your third choice.

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8) For each of the policy recommendations below, please indicate the level of urgency for implementation, keeping in mind the challenges and constraints (financial, structural, political, etc.) faced by campus leaders.

	implement immediately	implement within 3 years	implement within 5 years	not a preferable policy option
Provide financial and training support to faculty/departments to: encourage the revitalization of traditional LA courses to make them more relevant to diverse student populations; develop courses around contemporary issues utilizing new pedagogies and technologies; and create coherent, transdisciplinary thematic pathways based around specific learning themes making upper-division general education coursework relevant to both civic and professional preparation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Build advising capacity to better assist students in connecting their interest areas to LA majors to career.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Revise promotion and tenure policies to reflect an investment in LA disciplines, faculty renewal, and curriculum development and planning, and provide more opportunities for junior faculty. Create incentives to encourage faculty in LA disciplines to reinvigorate the focus on student learning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Launch a concerted campaign to leverage alumni, board and legislative support to lobby for increased state and federal funding support, and reduce the financial burden on students and their families.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reform financial aid practices to provide targeted support for under-represented students to pursue LA disciplines, not just STEM and professional fields.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

implement immediately implement within 3 years implement within 5 years not a preferable policy option

Mount an extensive PR campaign to broadly and effectively communicate (to the public, press, politicians, and other stakeholders), the research findings that demonstrate the positive outcomes of LA education including but not limited to: the civic, fiscal and cultural benefits to society; the employer/workforce preference for the characteristics and skills of students who have received a liberal education; and the career/advanced degree outcomes and job satisfaction levels of LA majors in relation to non-LA majors.



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9) Please share any additional comments/questions.

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APPENDIX J:
SUMMARY BRIEF

The Future of Liberal Arts in Higher Education Policy Delphi Summary Brief

A comprehensive undergraduate experience encompassing a broad survey of the humanities, arts and sciences, and multicultural, global education are instrumental components to a postsecondary experience designed to cultivate thoughtful, proactive, community-engaged lifelong learners equipped to manage the complex social problems of today. As demand for liberal arts programs continues to decline, campus leaders are responding in a variety of ways. Many are defaulting to program closure and contraction, while others are visioning more transformative pathways that address the needs of 21st century learners and educators. This study seeks to capture the expert opinions of prominent higher education experts and practitioners to create a set of policy recommendations intended to inform the long-term strategic planning and budget prioritization of campus leaders across the country. The recommendations detailed below are derived from a national expert panel of 21 faculty, administrators, and educational practitioners.

I. Survey Administration

Over the course of three months, a policy Delphi consisting of three survey rounds was administered to the expert panel. The first round contained both closed and open-ended items. The second contained primarily multiple-choice questions and was accompanied by a summary of panel responses to the first round. The final round utilized responses from the first two rounds to generate a list of policy options for higher education leaders and policy-makers and requested that panelists assess the desirability, urgency, pros, cons and trade-offs for each option. Based on the findings of this study, two policy options were ranked in the top three by at least 70% of the panel. The remaining four options were preferred by less than half of the panel and were subsequently removed from consideration as a final policy recommendation. Below are the two preferred recommendations, each with a summary of the panelists' comments.

II. Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Liberal Arts (LA) Course and Program Revitalization
Provide financial and training support to faculty/departments to encourage the revitalization of traditional LA courses to make them more relevant to diverse student populations; develop courses around contemporary issues utilizing new pedagogies and technologies; and create coherent, transdisciplinary thematic pathways based around specific learning themes making upper-division general education coursework relevant to both civic and professional preparation.

- Selected by 17 panelists to be in their top three, 12 of whom identified it as their first choice.

- The majority of the panelists (12) believed this approach should be implemented immediately, while an additional 7 supported implementation within three-five years. Only 2 panelists did not think this was a preferable policy option.

Overview

This policy option would provide resources to support the development, implementation and evaluation of revitalized liberal arts programs with clearer pathways from enrollment to career. Control of the curriculum would remain in the hands of the faculty, who would be empowered with resources and support from campus administration to reinvigorate their programs through collaborations with faculty across campus. This approach would support and help grow new and existing transdisciplinary programs that link the knowledge and skills of the liberal arts to workforce and professional preparation. This greater integration of programs across campus, in tandem with enhanced program to career advising and pedagogical growth and improvement, would enable liberal arts disciplines to reclaim their well-deserved value and legitimacy through clear demonstration of their 21st century relevance.

Benefits

These improved programs and delivery models would be more appealing to students and their families and ultimately lead to increased enrollments. As a result, increased resources would be directed toward the liberal arts colleges that would enable the preservation of existing liberal arts programs and courses as they grow alongside the new, transdisciplinary courses and programs. These new and revitalized programs would be more inclusive and equitable and utilize high-impact teaching, learning and co-curricular environments. This would help programs recruit and retain students and faculty from diverse backgrounds as their needs and demands are met by the more relevant, responsive programmatic offerings.

Challenges and Limitations

- This policy option would be cost-intensive to implement. Funds for professional development, office and personnel resources, faculty stipends and buy-outs, rewards for successful programs, etc., would require significant and sustained campus investment.
- Increased enrollments will take time to assess as students benefitting from this structural and curricular innovation begin to graduate. It will require patience, commitment and sustained support by campus leadership.
- The faculty investment required to reinvigorate curriculum and update pedagogical approaches would be substantial. Many may resist based on the perception of administrative overreach or be offended by the implication that their current practices and curriculum require change/defense. Furthermore, some may perceive such discussions as a threat to their disciplines.
- Campus-level administration may not be nimble enough to support collaborative initiatives of the scale needed to make institutional change. Innovation can be stifled by bureaucracy and reliance on past data to support future programming.

This initiative would require a bold pivot from the strategic decision-making models at many institutions.

- The greatest trade-off would be shifting limited resources away from other projects and priority areas to support this costly endeavor.

Recommendation #2: Public Relations (PR) Campaign

Mount an extensive PR campaign to broadly and effectively communicate (to the public, press, politicians, and other stakeholders), the research findings that demonstrate the positive outcomes of LA education including but not limited to: the civic, fiscal and cultural benefits to society; the employer/workforce preference for the characteristics and skills of students who have received a liberal education; and the career/advanced degree outcomes and job satisfaction levels of LA majors in relation to non-LA majors.

- Selected by 15 panelists to be in their top three, 2 identified it as their first choice.
- Of the panelists who responded, the majority (10) believed this recommendation should be implemented immediately, 7 said implement within 3-5 years, and only one panelist said it was not a preferable policy option.

Overview

Effectively communicating the value of higher education has been consistently problematic for campus leadership, particularly in relation to the liberal arts disciplines. This current era of increasing political polarization and anti-intellectualism has catalyzed increased skepticism and misinformation regarding the value of liberal arts. This has negatively shaped public attitudes toward higher education, which impacts program enrollments and damages campus morale. Higher education leaders must launch coordinated public relations campaigns to disseminate a powerful counter-narrative to these derisive attacks by summarizing key findings of literature demonstrating the efficacy of liberal arts education in preparing students for career and civic life; clearly communicating ways in which the liberal arts are relevant to 21st learners through examples and success stories; and reaffirming the value of American higher education as a public good (deserving of public support) that promotes democracy and equality through research, education, and community service.

Benefits

This campaign would lead to increased and more diverse enrollments in liberal arts programs as students and their families better understand the benefit of liberal arts education for career, life and community well-being. More importantly, they must see themselves as welcome and included. If the case for higher education as a public good can effectively be made with state and national policymakers, funding may be restored to more manageable levels enabling institutions to innovate programming and practices, and to provide better financial aid and services to students in need.

Challenges and Limitations

- May be an overly idealistic policy option given the current political environment where truth and evidence are undervalued and all educational sectors are consistently derided and under-resourced.
- Will be very costly to mount a successful multi-tiered public relations campaign that effectively targets diverse audiences.
- The greatest trade-off would be the significant investment in time from administrators and faculty that could otherwise be focused on research, teaching, and other priority areas.

III. Conclusion

These bold initiatives would be costly to implement and require significant cultural change within institutions in order to be successful and sustainable. However, if the desired outcomes are realized, the results could be a radical re-visioning of liberal arts in American higher education that simultaneously transforms courses and programs into high-demand, interdisciplinary career pathways, while providing the resources to preserve the traditional disciplines. In the end, these reinvigorated programs will draw more diverse students and faculty, becoming more inclusive of and responsive to our increasingly multicultural society.

Liberal arts education provides students with access to an extensive array of knowledge and skills essential to creating and maintaining a thriving democratic society. When the spirit of inquiry into a broad field of diverse knowledge systems and multicultural perspectives is diminished, so too departs the empathy and understanding that defines and distinguishes humanity. Now more than ever, we need to reengage the populace in critical inquiry and self-reflection. The policy recommendations produced by this expert panel can work in concert with existing campus agendas to help move American higher education into a new era where it may finally act as the great equalizer that our country is so desperately in need of today.

APPENDIX K:
EXPERIENCE SURVEY

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Design My Survey

Design your survey below. You can add new questions by clicking 'Add Question Here', or update survey settings.

When you're ready to collect results, click [Collect Responses](#).

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Experience survey: Policy Delphi on the Future of Liberal Arts in Higher Education

[✎ Edit Survey Name](#)

[➕ Add Question Here](#)

[✎ Edit Question](#) [📄 Copy Question](#) [✕ Delete Question](#) [⌘ Add Skip Logic](#)

1) Was the topic of this policy Delphi, "The Future of Liberal Arts in Higher Education" relevant to your profession?

- ☐ very
- ☐ somewhat
- ☐ not at all

☐ Other:

[+ Add a New Question Here](#)

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[✎ Edit Question](#)

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2) How effective do you think the policy Delphi survey approach utilized in this study was as a tool for generating useful policy recommendations for higher education leaders and practitioners?

- ☐ Very
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Other:

[+ Add a New Question Here](#)

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3) How likely is it that you will use one or more of the recommendations produced by this policy Delphi panel at your own institution?

- ☐ Very likely
- ☐ Somewhat likely
- ☐ Not likely at all
- ☐ Other:

 Add a New Question Here  Make a New Page Here

 Edit Question  Copy Question  Delete Question  Add Skip Logic

4) Please share any additional feedback and questions you may have on the topics covered, the survey process, etc.

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